

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
OFFICE OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY



Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with Brenda Hill Pollard
SHE.OH.016
December 12, 2019 and February 19, 2020

Interview Information:

Interviewer: Ellen Brooks

Interview Location: Raleigh, Wake County, North Carolina

Interview Runtime: 03:17:22

Transcribed By: Sarah Waugh and Gretchen Boyles, July 2020

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Summary By: Gretchen Boyles, July 2020

Collection: “She Changed the World” Oral History Project

Interview Summary:

This oral history interview with Brenda Hill Pollard covers her general life history with a focus on her career as executive assistant to longtime North Carolina Secretary of State, Thad Eure. Pollard worked in secretarial and administrative positions in the North Carolina state government for over twenty years. Pollard’s career and community involvement were recognized through her title of 2018 North Carolina’s Democratic Woman of the Year. She serves on the State Capitol Foundation and is involved with the Daughters of the American Revolution, as well as other organizations, remaining active and engaged in her community.

Pollard was born and raised in Johnston County, North Carolina. She moved to Raleigh to pursue a career of service in state government. She and her husband, Larry, reside in Durham County, North Carolina.

In the interview, Pollard discusses growing up on a farm and the impact her family had on her. She describes her high school years, early career aspirations, and her first two jobs. She talks about her decision to move to Raleigh and her subsequent job search. Pollard describes her work with Secretary Eure, with particular focus on her increasing responsibilities. Pollard discusses her experiences within government, interacting with her community, and her own campaigns for office.

Pollard discusses her own struggles with tragic deaths and her endometriosis. She describes being an “unprecedented” executive assistant due to her gender. She describes her honor as North Carolina’s 2018 Democrat of the Year and what the award meant to her personally, as well as her interactions with younger generations and other politically involved women. Pollard continues to serve through Junior Leagues, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the State Capitol Foundation, and the North Carolina Democratic Party.

Biographical Sketch:

Brenda Pollard (nee Hill) was born on May 4, 1951 in Johnston County, North Carolina to Dorothy June Hill and Vernon Fletcher Hill. She married attorney Thomas Lawrence “Larry” Pollard. Brenda Pollard worked for over eighteen years as the executive assistant for North

Carolina Secretary of State Thad Eure, as well as working in other executive branch offices. She was named the 2018 North Carolina Democratic Woman of the Year, currently serves her community through membership and leadership in various organizations, and she has been a candidate for several elected positions in North Carolina.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions reflect the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript. Timestamps are approximate.

Interview Transcript:

[Start SHEOH_016_01]

Brooks: Today is December 12, 2019. This is an interview with Brenda Hill Pollard, who was previously the executive assistant to the Secretary of State for eighteen and a half years and was named North Carolina's 2018 Democrat Woman of the Year for the Democrat Women of North Carolina. This interview is being conducted for the North Carolina State Archives She Changed the World Oral History Project. The interviewer is Ellen Brooks. So, we're just gonna start at the beginning if you can tell me where and when you were born.

Pollard: I was born in Johnston County, North Carolina.

Brooks: Okay, and when?

Pollard: And I was born in 1951.

Brooks: Great. So, tell me just a little bit about growing up and what type of childhood you had.

Pollard: Growing up, I had three sisters: an older sister, three years older, and a twin sister, and I had a younger sister, that was six years younger. But growing up, we were on a tobacco farm. It was a farm where we had pigs, and we grew our cotton, and tobacco, and vegetable garden, and it was—it was a community of service. It was a farm life where your neighbor was truly your neighbor, and if you needed a helping hand then you would just go to that person, and vice-versa. So, growing up we had very little economically. We were sometimes day-by-day because we had to live off the land, and you cannot control God and His weather, and sometimes our farm did not produce what we needed. So, we had to preserve a lot, can a lot. My mother spent a lot of time preparing in the summer with fresh vegetables, and we had apple trees, and peach trees, and she would make preserves. So, there was a lot of preparing each and every day for the future. Having said that, what we had more than abundantly was love. Was love. Um, in those days, and now also, we lived next door to my father's mother, because my father—his parents owned their own farm. And, in those days, it was unprecedented, but my grandmother—his mother— inherited land from her father. So again, this is unprecedented for a woman to inherit land. So, when she met my grandfather, they merged their farms, and these farms were listed—actually, they were land granted farms that we inherited. So, having grown up on the land, I value the soil of Johnston County, and I like to say the dirt under my nails is the soil of North Carolina. And, um, I'm proud of that.

Brooks: What type of kid were you?

Pollard: I beg your pardon.

Brooks: What type of kid were you?

Pollard: Well, I think I would like to say, normal, in terms of wanting to play and not really do a lot of work in the home or on the farm, but you have to learn to do both. Children like to play a lot, that's their learning apparatus, and so when they're playing, they're working. But we did work in the farm, and we had chores to do. I always wanted a brother because we had farm animals that had to be fed, so we would take turns feeding the animals. We had mules because we were on a farm, and so somebody had to feed them every night. And so, it was a labor-intensive childhood, but so worthy to look back and know that you can do anything, if you put your mind to it. So, um, just growing up with my sisters, we had our usual disagreements and always agreed to come back together. That's what strengthens you as a family, you don't all—you're in the family, and you have the same parents—we had the same parents, not every family does—but we learned the values of our parents' teachings. They made certain that every Sunday we were in church. That was something—it wasn't a requirement; it was something we wanted to do. So, each Sunday we were in church, and we grew up in the Presbyterian faith, and every year there would be a ceremony, and if you attended every Sunday, you were awarded a pin. And we were honored to receive that. In fact, we accomplished so many pins, they were draped on our jacket, because we were certainly in church, and that's carried me a long ways, with faith, and I continue to rely on it.

[00:05:22]

Brooks: And what about school? What kind of student were you?

Pollard: I would say average. Wanted to be above—and some of the classes I did excel, some of the classes were—there were subjects that were a little more difficult to accomplish and to understand. But as far as school, we had our elementary school was Glendale. Then in the later years, those four small schools were consolidated into North Johnston High School, so my sister and I—my twin sister Linda—we started together as the first to accomplish four years in the same high school. So school was always—if you weren't in school, you better be in a doctor's office. Uh, our parents made sure that you're not gonna stay home. If you're sick, then we'll go to the doctor, but you don't miss school because school is so invaluable to your training—and your—to have that knowledge. And, let me add a caveat, in my upbringing in those school days, the teachers were such a hands-on part, they wanted to instill knowledge in you, and they became a mentor to you, and they advised you, and they were—still, I have several schoolteachers that I contact and they still advise me.

Brooks: Wow.

[whispering, long pause]

Were there any subjects or activities that you particularly liked?

Pollard: Well, I remember an activity—my older sister was cheerleader. Uh, my twin sister and I wanted to be like our older sister, so we tried out for cheerleading. My twin sister won—it was a competition, but it was a competition within the student body—so it was almost a personality, congeniality kind-of award, as it were. But there was certainly a skill set. So, my sister won, and I didn't win, then my younger sister tried out for cheerleading; she won! So, all that aside, every sister—we would sit at the kitchen table and talk about cheering, and I decided, it just wasn't my pathway. So, I tried to study very hard in drama. So much so that the drama teacher said, "Brenda, you've been selected as the lead female role in the high school play." So, for me that was validation that I had accomplished something personally, and that she had seen that. And so, I've never forgotten it.

Brooks: What play was it?

Pollard: It was a play called "Onions in the Stew," and no one knows the title [laughs], and that's fine. It was "Onions in the Stew," but you understand, in high school, when you pay royalty for a play—had we played "King and I," or any of the larger productions, that we just couldn't afford the royalty. But we still had a play. And so, in the play—and I still remember I had a boyfriend on the stage named Grover—and Grover and I were just so madly in love in the play. And I remember preparing stage makeup—if you're in the back of the room, and you're looking for people on the stage, you need to see the eyes, because you talk with your eyes. And we would put red dots inside, on the nose, just putting those red dots so that if you're in the back of the auditorium you can see the person's eyes that is talking on stage. And the stage makeup, respectfully, was much more overdone with cosmetics so that you could see the face of the participant on the stage. So we learned a lot about stage lighting, and just the gratification of—and to memorize, you had to know your lines, and everyone else. And so just accomplishing that, and the participants that came—mainly your parents, and friends, and the neighbors, to support the school, um, they were paying money they could've spent on food or gasoline, or their students, themselves, but they came for that. And the accomplishment that the team did in the school play does ripple into your careers.

[00:10:26]

Brooks: Can you say more about that? Like, what did you get out of it?

Pollard: Well, it gave me more confidence as I have—my journey in public service, I feel comfortable in front of an audience—two people, or two hundred. It taught me to look at people. They don't wanna see the top of your head. They wanna see your face. Slow down, be clear, be concise, so that people can hear you and understand what you're trying to tell them. So, it was good training in terms of what I did not know was gonna come, as I came into a more personal journey and career.

Brooks: And you mentioned your dad's parents lived close by. Did you have other extended family around when you were growing up?

Pollard: My father had sisters. He was the only boy—there were five children, and he had four sisters, but they lived in other states, and some lived close enough that we could visit. And in those days—and maybe today—we'd load up the car on Sunday after church, and we'd go visit his sisters. And they would always have a big lunch—lot of vegetables from their garden. Remember, they had farms too; we were in the country. So, we would make a point—he wanted to see his sisters, and Sunday was your—that was the day off. That was the day that you worshipped. That was the day that you visited family. And you made those family connections, which are so vital. Support of family is so vital.

Um, again my father's mother—my grandfather had passed away when I was five, and I must add this caveat—I was five, and my grandfather would always ask the grandchildren, "What do you want from the country store?" Which was just maybe a mile down the road. We always wanted a chocolate popsicle. And he would bring that chocolate popsicle. I don't know how it didn't melt, but it survived, and he would bring it; he wouldn't forget—that's a critical point, when children want something, they want you to bring it—but he would surprise us. He'd bring us a little brown bag filled with penny candy. And the penny candy was in containers, so he would just reach in and each grandchild got their own bag of penny candy. Why is that so important? At this stage, you still remember it? It's important because someone loves you—it's all about the love. You need that. You need that vitally. So, you can pass that on. And he did that for us.

Brooks: Yeah. That's great. And was your mom originally from North Carolina as well?

Pollard: My mother was from the adjoining county—Wilson County. My father was from Johnston County, and my mother grew up in Wilson, and she was Dorothy June Hill. My father was Vernon Fletcher Hill. And I said, "Mother, you didn't have to change your name." She said, "No, I didn't." And I said, "And you were ahead of your time. You were ahead of your time. You did not change your name." So, um, they met through friends, and she had many, many, attributes—we could talk about that, if you want to later.

Brooks: And did they have other jobs or was the farm their primary job?

Pollard: My father was the farmer. It was the family farm, he was the eldest, and the only, son. So it seemed—the sisters had left the farm—they were married and had left the farm. It's very normal, very understood. They didn't stay on the farm. He wanted to take care of his mother, because his father had died—my grandfather died shortly after I was five years old. He had died. So he took that responsibility very seriously. However, in the summer, he was a farmer. In the winter, there was no planting and so forth, so he studied, and got a certificate, in what is called cruising, where he would go into farmland, and there would be tobacco—actually, timber on that farmland—and he would cruise and tell the owner if that land, if that tobacco—excuse me, the timber—was valuable or not. So he was called a cruiser, in the winter, in the off season. And he worked for Boise Cascade

Corporation, which still exists. It's a huge paper company. And that was his off-season.

[00:15:38]

My mother was a homemaker. Devoted to her career as a mother, which is the highest calling. And she had four daughters. And she was so, so involved in her children. She—however, when the children were older—she took a day job and she wanted to bring in extra income for the children. So she worked at—it's called Devil Dog Manufacturing Company. And they made children's clothes. She stood—literally, everyday—on concrete and folded children's clothes, on production, and put it in a box to be shipped.

Brooks: Wow. Mm-hm. Okay.

[long pause]

Okay, we were talking about your mother's job. You wanted to add something?

Pollard: I wanted to add that Mother—and I'd like to use the word sacrifice—mothers do that, they want nothing for themselves. They want everything for their children. And when she was standing every day on that concrete, it became apparent that her varicose veins were going to have to be stripped out of her legs. And so she had to have a surgery to correct something that she was doing professionally, in her career. But that's the kind of person, and that's the kind of mother she was. So we admire that. But she had, in her single life, three jobs. Before she married my father, she worked in Washington, D.C. She worked for the government's printing office where they printed the money, and then she had a second job where she would clean the trains that went from city to city—that being like an airplane, you know, when you come in and land, someone's gotta clean those planes—so she was cleaning the trains. One time she said that the train left the depot [laughs] with her in it, but she was concerned she'd not get back to the same place, but it's just a matter of circling around, so she got back. But she also worked at a deli. She made sandwiches. So where am I going with all this? The DNA that my mother gave me—she worked hard. She worked hard as a single person—not a single mother, but a woman, who had to have, to survive, three jobs. And she worked in D.C, and I wanna just share this one story about her and her brother, who was in the navy, who had come in from World War II, to visit. She was the youngest of the children, and he was probably the oldest. And she had found a fur coat. Now that's not a luxury, that's a necessity in Washington, D.C. So she had found a fur coat, and she had it on layaway. She was paying a little bit every month. And her brother said, "You know, that's something I need to know about." So she'd gone to work, she came home, and she saw a box with a big bow, and he said, [choked up] "There's a gift for you." He had paid—he had paid off the cost of the coat. He said, "This is my gift to you."

[00:20:25]

Again, that's what family does. That's called love. She needed a coat. He didn't want her to be cold, so he paid it off. I have the coat. Mother had four children, but I really wanted that coat.

Brooks: So you convinced your sisters that you should have it?

Pollard: So, I seemed to be the one that fit into the coat [laughs]. So, that said, it fit my body, and I have the coat today. It's very special. I don't wear the coat. It's just something I needed to keep that was my mother's. That showed me strength, and perseverance, and love of family. And I wanted to share that, um, because she also, when my father—and I told—and I asked Mother this—'cause Mother has passed away. I said, "Well, Mother, my father was going to World War II—" he was flying to Berlin, he was drafted, he did not want to go—but in World War II, we had citizens—women and men who sacrificed for our government and for our country, greatly. And um, I said, "Mother, why didn't you marry my father before he left?" And she responded very quickly, "I wanted him to come home, not his check." Again, that showed—it just showed me who my mother was, she said, "Oh, Brenda, a lot of women are marrying the men knowing they're not coming home, but they'll have a check. I want your father." So then my father did come home from Berlin, from World War II. He was in Paris. He was in Berlin, Germany.

And I have to add a caveat now about my father, and what he did for our government and for our country. He, um, he was a military policeman. He was a master sergeant in the Army. He was selected when President Truman and General Dwight Eisenhower came to inspect the troops in Berlin. They selected five military police. And one was my father. My father didn't talk about that. His family did. He didn't talk about it. He didn't talk about World War II. It was too painful. He occasionally would share with me, when I would ask, I guess I pressed him too much—I wanted to know. And I said, "Daddy." He said, "Brenda, why did I come home? My best friends were blown to pieces standing beside of me, why was I sacrificed?" And I would always say to him, "You came home so I could be born."

And we both had a good laugh because he came home, and he married my mother, and they had my sister June, and, um, then they waited, three years later, and twins were born—and my sister and I. When the doctor came out and said, "You've got twins," he fainted! [laughs] Because they did not know, and that's another story. My mother thought she was gonna have twins, but in those days there were no tests to confirm any of the above, and she just kept telling her mother, "I'm gonna have twins. I've seen two rainbows. I've seen these visions. I already have the names, Linda and Brenda. I just know I'm gonna have twins, and I can't see my feet! I'm just so big!" [laughs] So, she had twins. And she—when I was—I was the first born, and when the doctors and the nurses were cleaning up, and tidying up after my birth, and my mother was in such pain, she said, "I don't know, but I don't feel too good." And they said, "Oh my, we're gonna have

another birthday." And my sister was born five minutes after me. So, even they didn't know at that time, so.

[00:25:15]

My sister lives in Raleigh, and I live in Durham. So we're very close, as well as my older sister. Sadly, my youngest sister Caroline, at the age of nineteen, was driving home from work—actually coming to see me in Raleigh—and never came, never got there. She had a car accident, and she was killed. We hope instantly, for her sake. But, um, there were no witnesses, and there was one other car, and we will never know, we did a lot of research to see which skid marks, and such, because there was no—it was in the country, there was no witnesses to really know what happened. But at the end of the day, she cannot be brought back. So no matter what we could testify and take it to court, she's not gonna be coming back. So.

Brooks: How old were you when that happened?

Pollard: There were six years difference. I would say twenty-two. I would mentor Caroline—she um, would come to Raleigh—I wanted her to be a page in the legislature. And she did that, she was a page in the House, she was a page in the Senate, and I wanted her to be a page in the governor's office. I wanted her to have those experiences. And she—my father had passed away three years earlier. My father had passed away three years earlier in 1973. And uh—with a heart attack—massive heart attack—he was fifty-six. I was in my early twenties. We were very close. You know, there's that special bond between fathers and daughters, usually, and we were very close.

There was a lot of discipline in our home, which was great. 'Cause discipline is love. And he believed in that. And um, it's good to have—when you're growing up, when you're in your teens, you need those parameters because teenagers are gonna try to push the envelope. They're gonna try to do what they can do, and you just have to have those rules. So, we grew up with discipline. And he grew up with discipline. But, in his passing, we had a relationship of—we would just talk—there was no longer the discipline that he had to parent through. It was conversations we would have between each other.

But when he passed, we didn't have that goodbye. When he had his massive heart attack—and he had had an attack in his thirties, so we were all aware, if he had another one, the heart muscle—in other words, when the heart goes, you go. It is the number one killer. Not cancer, not any—I mean, these are all horrific, but the heart is—if that goes, you go. And he was in a coma, and, um, he slipped away from us, so we never got to say the goodbye. But you—but I honor—and I always do this on Veterans' Day, and on his birthday—I honor him. If there's an article in the newspaper I can put his name and picture of his military picture. That's what we do. We honor our parents because they sacrificed so much for us.

[00:29:34]

Brooks: So at what point in your early life do you remember thinking about what you wanted to be when you grew up?

Pollard: Well, my father—my father—I was twelve, thirteen, and sadly he was in a car wreck, where his back was broken in five places. And he was hospitalized for months and had to lift—there was a bar over his bed and he had to lift his back, and he had to move—he can't just stay on his back, it was excruciating rehab for him. And so, every day that we could go—and they would let children into the hospital in those days. Today it's a little more restricted.

So it occurred to me, at twelve or thirteen, that I would just go bedside—I think they're called candy-stripers in those days—and I would offer juice, or a popsicle, or candy. Whatever the patient wanted, I was gonna go get it and make them feel better. So I said, "Daddy, I wanna be a nurse." "Okay, that sounds great. You'd be a good one." Very encouraging, very encouraging. So one day I came back to the hospital, walked into the patient's room, and the man wasn't in his bed. So I went into my father's bed, by his bedside, and it was private rooms—I said "Daddy,"—we call daddy in the South, not father, not dad, but daddy—I said, "Daddy, what happened to the man in the room next door?" And I still remember the answer he said to me. "He went to Heaven, honey." Having said that, my father could've said anything. He could've said, "He died." He didn't. He said, "He's gone to heaven." Choices of words are powerful. They stay with you longer than you know. Weigh them. Because that was a turning point in my life. I couldn't lose a patient. My career path changed in my mind. I wanted to serve, but I couldn't lose a patient. I'd felt that maybe I had failed in that endeavor—I mean, that's your mind of a twelve and thirteen-year-old, I suppose. And I just wasn't comfortable with that in my mind anymore. And um, but my father was able to come home and we moved on. We moved on. So my pathway changed.

Brooks: Okay, and what did it change towards?

Pollard: Having gone through the high school, you have to choose if you're going to be—and in those days, you were a wife or—wife, a teacher, or a secretary—

Brooks: Or a nurse! Or a nurse.

Pollard: Or a nurse.

Brooks: You'd already crossed that one off.

Pollard: And I'd checked that one off. And so, I knew that my parents—as I'd said earlier—financial, and the economy and money was limited. It is what it is, and reality of what it is. That I would need to secure employment. And so I studied in the pathway of secretarial. So when I came to Raleigh to interview, that was my training—I had typing skills, and bookkeeping—I mean all the credits I needed to enter that world of administration. And I did. Um, and in my mind, it became

more of a public servant. Not a nurse, but still serving. You just want—in my mind, you wanna be a servant.

Um, as I said, I grew up, my whole family, in the church. And in our belief, you serve. Um, Christ came to serve. And we're Christian, so we serve. So that's what we do. And so, I wanted to be the best I could be in the career that had led me to that, in school, and to give back to my parents if I could, by working and earning a little bit. My father liked to grill out, but he needed a new grill. So his four daughters would collectively give what they could to buy him—buy something for him—because they had given to us year after year after year. And if mother needed something, then we wanted to get her something. So that was our goal, and that's what we wanted to do, it wasn't mandated.

Brooks: How did you feel being limited to those career paths?

Pollard: It wasn't something that troubled me. You thought about it, but it wasn't something that I lost sleep over. I thought women certainly deserved to be a doctor, a professor, or anything—an astronaut, anything they wanted to be. I've always believed in that, that women can do anything they put their mind to, but it wasn't something personally that I was marching for at that point. But I do recall coming home one day, and, um, talking to my mother. I can still see our discussion. I can still see her face. I said, "Mother, I've been working and working and working, living at home, driving back and forth, carpooling back and forth." I said, "I'd like to go back to college." And she looked at me with tears, "We can't afford it. Wish we could." [choked up] Because when children ask their parents for something, if the child asks for the moon, the parent wants them to have it. But she couldn't. And that was the end of it.

Brooks: You said back to college, had you been?

Pollard: I had studied. I had not had the opportunity, so what I would do, during my career, on my lunch hour, I would study at NC State University in Raleigh. I was taking classes on my lunch hour. The challenge of grabbing a sandwich and eating it in your car to get to the campus to get into the classroom, to take that forty-five minute class, jump back in the car, and get back to your work desk, was challenging, but I did it. And at night, I took classes at Peace University, and back at NC State. At that time it was Peace College, but I took night classes there and received a certificate for legal secretaries. The local attorneys—it was part of their community service to teach each week, a different topic—so I completed that degree at Peace College, which is now Peace University—because, I was working for the Secretary of State, of North Carolina, and he was an attorney. And in—if you're working for an attorney, there is a language, there is a legal terminology that you've gotta understand. Not having trained in that in high school, I needed that training. So on my own initiative, I searched, and Peace was offering the certificate, so I'm proud to have it, and I passed it. Then moved on to NC State, studying economics at State. Quite challenging—supply and demand. But I wanted to learn more about that, wanted to learn more about English, writing, and

so I was talking credits at night as, um—there's a category for it—maybe unregistered student, and so forth. So many more now, opportunities for people who are working full-time, who need to work full-time, and earn money, to support themselves, but yet there's online classes now. In those days there wasn't that opportunity, so it was a little more challenging to get to the campus. But, um, I just wanted to stop working and start school full-time with the help of my parents, but they couldn't. And there was no possibility. So I had to do what I had to do, and that was sort of, slip it in, where I could.

[00:39:46]

Brooks: Yeah. So, after high school, what came, like, directly after high school? Did you start working right away?

Pollard: Right away. Directly out of high school, I lived—well, I was at home, because I had to, and so were my sisters. Um, when you finish high school, you've gotta get on your feet, so to speak, and have a place to stay and so forth. But there was a—I took a job, in Wilson, at a tobacco company called Imperial Tobacco Company, and it was 7am to 7pm job, with a half hour for lunch. Pretty demanding. And what I was hired to do, was to take tobacco—and chopped, dry tobacco—and put it on a—almost a petri dish—and weigh it, and just stack it on a carrier. Just like, a hundred petri dishes [laughs]. And we just weighed it, and kept weighing it, and that was my task all day.

It occurred to me, in about a month, and not much more, I would come home at 7pm, I would be eating dinner—my mother would have it provided—and I'd fall asleep in my plate, exhausted. Now you think, well that's not an exhausting job, but day in, day out, when you couldn't even leave the site because you had to bring your sandwich for the half hour lunch; you couldn't leave your office space because you had to be right back in a half hour. I said, "Mother, this is good money, but I have no life. I've gotta do better than this for me." And she said, "Yes." And we'll talk more about that. So I decided to come to Raleigh, and interview, and to try to find more of an eight to five with an hour lunch [laughs].

Brooks: [laughs] That's the dream!

Pollard: And more life. Money is one thing, but life is one thing. And it needs to be a balance. That's my opinion.

Brooks: So, why Raleigh? Why was that the choice?

Pollard: My older sister was working in state government. She was with the Department of Motor Vehicles. In those days, it was data processing. The old—I mean, machines were big as a building, and she was happy with government, and Raleigh is still government, and she was happy with it. And I also had to—I didn't have a car—I had to carpool, so it seemed to fit—you know, things just seemed to fit. I could carpool. I could live at home until I could get on my feet, financially. And that's why we chose Raleigh to interview.

Brooks: Was it a bit of a culture shock between where you grew up and the city?

Pollard: Um, not so sure it was a culture shock, but Raleigh in those days, at nineteen years old, can be intimidating. Even now! The cars, there's lots—there's just so—you know, you're leaving the country to the city, there's more cars, there's more people, there's more activity. And when you're nineteen, I mean even if you're in college—whatever—if you're in college, or newly-married, or—getting a new place to live—it's called exploration. And you're no longer a teenager. You've graduated from high school—supposed to live on your own. There are a lot of temptations. There are a lot of pathways. And you have to choose. That's when you use everything that you've been told, to guide you. Some people go down the wrong path. There's no right or wrong, but some go down a different pathway. So you—that's where the discipline comes in, and the faith comes in, and the love of family comes in—and if you don't have that, you go astray. Some people go astray because they haven't had it in their growing up. And I was privileged to have it. Because when you have a child, there's no manual that comes with it—parents do the best they can. They're not perfect. They make mistakes. And you can have ten children, and you might have one that even in that family goes astray. And didn't he get that lesson, or didn't she get that lesson? [laughs] We were all at the table when we heard what to do about things. But still, people make mistakes. That's part of life.

[00:45:17]

Pollard: But, as far as a culture change, I came from a small community. And I remember just being friendly. In fact, that's our label. It's called "Friendly Kenly." Just talking with people. And they presume, Why are you talking to me? You wanna marry me? I don't wanna marry you; I'm just saying hello! But they didn't understand—they misconstrued your being very—you're just talking to a complete stranger. Well, that's normal for me, is to be engaged with the community, and that's what—only one other caveat. That's the only thing that was kind of shocking to me, is you speak to people and they go, Why are you talking to me? I go, I'm just being neighborly. And it was misconstrued.

But I also realized, and this is still sad to me—I grew up on a tobacco farm, cotton farm. I picked cotton. I been in a tobacco field, with the sun beating down every day. We worked every day, Monday through Saturday, with one day off. Working in the field, getting water at the end of a day, getting a good meal, starting over the next day. My playmates and workmates were African American. I still believe in equality. I still believe everybody's blood is red. Your skin color is given to you by God. I didn't pick my skin color. I didn't pick my parents. You can pick your friends. But my playmates, and the people that worked side by side—we were, just never, until I came to Raleigh, saw that division of race. I never saw that. And my parents never, ever saw that. And I don't see it today—I think everybody—my parents instilled in us, treat everybody with fairness and equality. Because we're all God's children. And so that still disturbs me that we can't do that. And I just

think we can. And that's what I try to do, is respect everybody, treat everybody—try to try, to treat the same.

Brooks: What was the first job that you ended up with here in Raleigh?

Pollard: I went to NC State, and they had a company—actually, it wasn't NC State; it was next to the campus—called Bolton Air Conditioning and Heating Company. It was a family company, but they did a lot of the work at the campus, on the university. There were several engineers, mechanical engineers, electrical engineers, and they needed a secretary, but it was a part-time—it was full-time, but part-time. So I went to work in this—and I knew that with the interview, but I needed a job—and I started in the summer. And I'll never forget, it was Christmas—December, uh, the husband and the wife were on—always at the office, but it was the wife who would hire and fire, that was her job. And so Mrs. Bolton called me in her office, her private office, and she said, "Brenda, we need to talk." I said, "Yes, ma'am." "I have a gift for you." This nice, big red bow, and red—I'll never forget that—a red leather handbag. Very nice. NC State, they were very supportive. And I said, "This is so wonderful." And with one gift, she said, "And your job's over."

[00:50:03]

Brooks: Oh, no.

Pollard: I said, "Mrs. Bolton, it's been a pleasure working with you and your company. I understood that when we walked into the door, that it was going to end. It's seasonal. Uh, it hurts because I've enjoyed it. I've enjoyed very much working here with you and learning things here and working here with the team, but um, I thank you for the opportunity, and I thank you for the gift."

So after Christmas, I took a little time off to collect myself, to think about what I wanted to do next, and uh, it was back to the shoe leather on the sidewalk, and I mean, you know when people say, you walk the shoe leather off—maybe not today, 'cause it's all online interviews—but I wanted to work in government, hopeful for more of a stable career. These first two had just been exhausting in terms of expectations and so forth.

So I would go—in those days, there were personnel—each department had a personnel director, and I would just go, and I would ask for an interview, or if there's anything opening. To the point that one director said, "Brenda, weren't you here last week?" I said, "Yes sir, and I'll be here next week." "You're determined." I said, "Yes, I am. I would like to work in government." So one day, I got a call, and there was an opening in the Department of Forestry. Now, my father, as I referenced, was a cruiser, in forestry. And it seemed to fit my personal journey. I felt good about it, and I interviewed and was hired. But again, full-time, part-time. No benefits. I had a job, but I had no health insurance. But I had a job. And I was in. I had my foot in, and I was getting experience.

I was supporting the front desk in that job, answering at the lunch hour, the front desk phone. And in those days, it was like, 200 lines lighting up all at once, looked like a Christmas tree. And you had to answer each line. Pretty challenging, but you could do it. And that was lunch hour. I would cover for that person, and then my job was to support one of the foresters, Mr. Thornhill. But I got to use my skills. Take shorthand, in those days. He would dictate the letter, and I would take shorthand and prepare the letters. And then, in that position, I got to go into the mailroom and open all the mail. And make sure the mail was put in the baskets at all the desks. So I was working in the mailroom, which was the size of a small closet.

So, it occurred to me, I needed to move forward. I needed, um, benefits. Because it occurred to me, the time had come, and the reality was setting in, that college, full-time, was not gonna be my path. That I would be working full-time and supporting myself. So, um, I started inquiring, and asking, friends that I had developed some relationships with, and they said, "Oh by the way, there's an opportunity, we think, with Governor Bob Scott's Committee on Law and Order. They're needing a secretary in the entry level." I said, "I'm over there. I'm interviewing." And I did, and I got the job. So I was, as they say, the low man on the totem pole, the entry level. And again, using my skills. But—and it was in a house, not a building; it was in one of the homes over near the mansion—it was a different environment. You were in a home, and you had your desk, and I like people, and I really wasn't seeing people, so I wasn't, you know, personally happy on that.

[00:55:01]

So, I again, said, we gotta do something different. I started talking with people again, and they said, "Well, I've heard that the Secretary of State—Thad Eure's secretary is getting married. And leaving. And there's a possibility that he's hiring someone to replace her." So I had been to that personnel director and had left my documents with him, and my resume and had not heard anything, so I went back to that personnel director, and told him that I had heard there might be an opening, and he said, "I'll get you an interview. There's about 200 people in line for the job." I said, "Well, I would just appreciate an interview. That's really all I would—I'd just love an interview." To meet the Secretary of State again—I had met him in the eighth grade, and in the fourth. He'd been there over fifty years. I just wanted to meet him again and just have the interview. That was really all I thought I would ever accomplish on that. I went for the interview, in the State Capitol, and I still remember looking up, and the size of the building was so large, so intimidating, and I walk in, a country girl from Johnston County, coming in to interview with the Secretary of State of North Carolina, and his Chief of Staff. Not one person asking the questions, but two people asking the questions.

So I'm sitting in this chair, feeling like a baseball game. I feel like I'm on the mound, and I'm getting balls from every direction. And so, the Chief of Staff would ask a question, and then the Secretary of State would ask a question. So at

the end of that interview, I went home, and put my head down on my pillow and I said, it's done, I had the interview. And that's what I wanted. The next day, the Secretary of State calls my boss, and said, "I want to hire Brenda Pollard—" Brenda Hill, at that time [Brooks laughs]—"and I want her now." Because you need two weeks' notice. And not only did he call my boss, he came in person. Which was unprecedented. He came in person because he said, "I need her now. I want her to train with Barbara, who's leaving. She needs to be trained with Barbara." And it worked out, through all the logistics, and I was able to go to the Capitol, and shadow Barbara, who was leaving. And um, we'll talk about other parts of that if you'd like to.

Brooks: Sure, yeah. And what year was that?

Pollard: March 22, 1971.

Brooks: Alright [laughs]. You know the day.

Pollard: I know the day [laughs]. I know the year.

Brooks: Just while we're in this time period, was there anything substantial about the Vietnam War that was happening in your life, did you have a part on either side, or any side?

Pollard: Um, no, I did not. That was certainly all over the news, all in the paper, all at the water cooler. But I didn't have a family—I didn't have that connection with the war. I didn't. I mean I was certainly aware of it and had my opinions about it, but it wasn't on my radar, as it were.

Brooks: Sure. So, just tell me a little bit about how you felt getting that position, and how those first few weeks were?

Pollard: Well, to have been selected by the Secretary of State—he interviewed that one himself, and he chose. He saw something, I hope, I can't speak for him. How I feel about it—he saw something, hopefully, in me, that he knew that I could work with him. This was a one-on-one kind of opportunity in the State Capitol office. He had a hundred employees, but staff worked in the administration building. So this was his Capitol office. It was an honor. And it still is an honor and privilege. He's had many people work for him in his career, so it still—today, people associate me with the secretary.

I was just invited—he has been passed away now twenty-five years, and that distinction honored him with a highway marker this summer in his home county. And there was a lot of boxes to check to get that highway marker for him, and I was a part of the committee trying to help get that marker for him, and it was accomplished, and I was invited to speak at the ceremony. Which, again, um, it just ripples, on and on in my life. And I was able to talk about our work and what we hoped to accomplish during his career.

[01:01:09]

I began as a receptionist in the Capitol for him, receiving his guests. The challenges there are people would walk in and say, "Oh, well just tell Mr. Eure—tell Thad I said 'Hello!'" And you're thinking, who was that? But we had a little book that had photos of the General Assembly members, and their names and county. And so when they would be looking, I was looking at the book so that I could remember who that person was to say that Mr. Eure—Mr. Smith—had come by. So I did that, and then he kept two women in the office in the Capitol—his choice—he chose women, he could've had chose men—but he had two always in the Capitol, a receptionist and a private secretary.

So when Barbara left, and got married and went to Greenville—and by the way, her husband was on the GI Bill—they left, I mean that wasn't like she had to go, or—it was a life change for her, and she'd done an excellent job. And I remember, thinking to myself, She's done an excellent job, and I've watched her, and I've learned from her, and she's taught me a great deal about how the secretary likes certain things done a certain way. She'd been with him a long time. But it occurred to me, and I told the Chief of Staff—he said, "You know, no one can replace Barbara,"—and my response was, "And no one wants to, I certainly don't. I'm gonna be Brenda Hill. And I will do the best I can, but I can never fill the shoes of Barbara. She's one of a kind. But I will do the best I can do."

So, that said, Tricia was now the private secretary, and I was the receptionist, and we were roommates. Because she and I both were from Johnston County. I was from Kenly, and she was from Smithfield, so we just happened to be from Johnston County. We didn't know one another because we didn't go to school together—high school together. She went to a different school. But we both needed an apartment. And so, my twin sister, and another high school friend—so the four of us got a two-bedroom apartment, and the fun began. Two bedrooms, two bath. My sister and I shared a bedroom and a bath. They shared a bedroom and a bath. Um, long story short, Tricia met a young man, and they wanted to get married—they were in love—I wanted to see the ring. [Brooks laughs] I got to see the ring in the kitchen—I said, "Tricia!" She went, "I know, we're gonna get married. And I'm gonna leave." I went, "Oh my gosh! You're gonna leave—you're my roommate—you're gonna leave? And then you're gonna leave the office?" "Yeah, I'm gonna do it all." So, she got married, and Mr. Eure and I both went to Smithfield—I drove in, he drove in, his wife and he, and we all came to the wedding, and said our goodbyes to Trish, and Tricia got married. And I didn't see her for a while, 'cause life moves on.

He said, "Well, Brenda, I'm gonna tap you as my private secretary. I've been watching you as my receptionist, and you've done a good job. So now I'm gonna elevate you to my private secretary, and we're gonna hire somebody to the seat of the receptionist." And we did, Pam Brown. She was a Peace College graduate. Terrific, terrific, terrific person. So here we go with a new team. And as it turns out, I continued to stay, and the other young ladies would come and go. But what

was happening in my career is Mr. Eure was giving me more and more responsibility in my position. And we can talk about that in a minute.

[01:05:28]

Brooks: Yeah.

Pollard: I was registering all the lobbyists, with the help of staff—it was two of us, we registered all the lobbyists. And in those days, lobbyists would register with the Secretary of State—but there was no cost. You just had to sign in, so we'd know that you were in the building. The General Assembly passed a law that said, we want you to pay now, to register. So Mr. Eure and I had a discussion about it, he and I agreed, there won't be anybody that wants to pay to register when they've been doing it all for free. Well, we both were wrong. They stood outside the door. They stood in a line to pay their money and come in. And register. So, now there's a division. And in my day, it was just myself and one other staff member doing our job and this on top of it. Okay. Now it's a whole division that handles just lobbyists. Um, that's a whole thing of, when lobbyists would come to us, there was a form that had to be filled out and turned over to the Attorney General, showing who was supporting them or giving them money as lobbyists, or no money, just paperwork. And we'd have calls, and there would be a deadline, and the lobbyist would say, "I don't know where it went. We never got the form. I think the baby chewed it up. The dog got it—" We went, "I don't—you know, at the end of the day, we don't care what happened to the form, just explain it to the attorney general. We don't need anything—he does."

Brooks: [laughs] Right. You're just the middleman.

Pollard: We're just trying to get you the form to give it to him. So, um, then the secretary said, "Brenda, come in the office, I wanna talk with you." I said, "Okay." "I want you now, to assign the seats to the General Assembly." That was under our purview is we had to—when you got elected in the General Assembly, there was a chart and where you wanted to sit. Generally the freshmen sat in the back. That was sort of where you would learn, and then move up. Today I don't know, it's not under the Secretary anymore, it's under a different authority—

[01:08:08] [End of SHEOH_016_01]

[Start SHEOH_016_02]

Brooks: Okay. Go ahead.

Pollard: As I was talking about, the secretary had asked me to come in his office—his personal office—and he said, "Brenda, I want you to begin to assign the seats to the General Assembly members." That being said, when you're elected, uh, we had—the Secretary of State had—the responsibility to put people in their seating. 120 people in the house and fifty in the senate. And if you had been re-elected, you had your seat. It was your seat unless you wanted to give it up. And of course,

if you didn't run and it was an empty seat, then we could maybe put you in that seat. So I'll just add a caveat. Our current governor, Roy Cooper, was in the senate, and he said, "Brenda, I want this seat," and I said to him as senator, "If it's open, and we can do that, I'd be delighted to help in that manner." As it turns out, he got the seat he wanted, and I have reminded him that I made him who he is [Brooks laughs]. He is now the governor of North Carolina [both laugh]. I'm being facetious, but that, uh, seat assignment, as Mr. Eure said to me, "You're gonna make some people happy, and you're gon' make some people not so happy, so you deal with 'em [Brooks laughs]. I'm gon' let you have that joy and fun," and, uh, pretty much, people were okay with the seat assignment. But it's important in that the seats, if you wanna be with your colleagues in your area, you wanna sit next to them; sometimes that's not possible. And why is that important? Because there are bills that you need to discuss, and you don't have to be passing notes or whatever the trans—you know, in those days, the runners were the pages, and they'd run and run with notes—today it may be done with a text, but, um, anyhow. Um, the point I wanted to add was the secretary was giving more challenging and heavier responsibilities as I was maturing in that role as his private secretary.

So it occurred that he needed—and several people—including my mind—people kept saying to me, "You need to be his executive assistant." So I said, "Mr. Eure, we need to talk about that," and he listened intently, and he said, "Brenda, only a man can be an executive assistant." I said, "Mr. Eure, I'm doing the job. I understand what you're saying." He said to me, "Only a man can be an executive assistant to the governor of the state of North Carolina, and that is how that is." And that was his generation because he began as secretary of state in 1936, and in those generations, yes, there were men in the role of executive assistant to the governor. "This is a new day, Mr. Eure. I'm doing the job. I just happen to be a female, and I hope that you will consider it because I am doing it, and I want to do a good job for you, and let us think about this," so I just let—I just planted the seed and stepped away for weeks and then months and seemed like years, and one day he called me in his office, in his private office, and said, "Brenda, let's sit down and talk. I'm gonna do it." I said, "Do what?" [laughs] "I'm gonna make you the executive assistant to the secretary of state—my only one. I've never had one until now." I said, "And you've just made history, Mr. Eure. I didn't make—I didn't, but you did. This is unprecedented—a female executive assistant in the executive branch for you." So when he did that, others fell in line. Other counsel of state members started tapping their female assistants—they were assistants—they were secretaries—but they embraced the idea, and, um, thank God that that leadership and that vision. Because Mr. Eure was very progressive. He had five divisions, and I think three of those were headed by women. He had a female attorney. Uh, we handled all the corporations, and he hired a female—African American female—to head the department. His notaries public was Caucasian woman. Then she retired and then he tapped someone in the office, but African American female, to head that division. Then, he was promoting in within, which was okay because they had done the job and earned it, and certainly deserved it. I mean, he interviewed outside, but these people had done that and knew that,

inside and out. So under the Uniform Commercial Code Division, when that leadership retired—male—he said, "I'm tapping, in your office, Julie Surrat [sp?] and another Caucasian female."

[00:05:21]

Pollard: So time and again he was a visionary. And he was also—let me add a caveat about Mr. Eure—when he started, he was appointed to the job, and then he won it in 1936—we're here to talk about a lot of things, but his career is just unprecedented in his service—he had been county attorney; he'd been Speaker of the House; he had served in the General Assembly; he had held a lot offices, but more importantly, when he took this job, he embraced women coming into his department. Because women, in those days—it was the war years, and their—you know—their men were off at war, and so were some women—but pred—you know, the women were head of household—men away at war, children to feed—and he said, "Women can do these jobs," and he hired them.

So, um, becoming his executive assistant was time for celebration. Uh, we had a luncheon to mark the milestone, and I, um, still embrace that because it was—it opened the door for so many opportunities for other women, in my mind. And that he believed enough in me to accept that and to almost a mi—I mean, it changed his mind from generations of, That couldn't be, to what could be.

Brooks: Yeah. And so were you with his office for eighteen and half years, or were you executive assistant for eighteen and a half?

Pollard: I was with his office for eighteen and a half. Um, it was the last four or five years that I was his executive assistant. That came—that, um, promotion, as it were, was very risky, personally. Because when he had a mindset of, That's not gonna happen, that's not gonna happen. Um, but he was willing to talk about it, think about it, and I was willing to take the risk to ask. Because the doorway—the door was always open. You can always leave if you want to do something else. Uh, he's not gonna stand in your way. If that was what you want to do, go do it; it's just not gonna happen in my department. But it worked out. I wanted to be his executive assistant, um, it's just what I w—and my goal was, when he retired, I wanted to walk out behind him. And I got to do that, too. So when he retired, I got to walk out. When he walked out, I walked out behind him.

Brooks: And when—what year—was that?

Pollard: I wanna refer that to the early nineties, so—

Brooks: Okay. So he was in this role for sixty years? You said he started in '36?

Pollard: He started in 1936, and he left in probably 1990. [ed. note: 1989]

Brooks: Wow. So that's, yeah, fifty some-odd years.

Pollard: It was fifty-plus years he was in that. And I would sit and talk with him—you know, we didn't have an eight to five job. Uh, in the capital, we'd leave at nine p.m., ten, I mean, whenever the work was done. If people needed some and get a corporation charter, articles of incorporation, and they were coming out of Greensboro or Charlotte, and they were on their way—you gotta understand, in those days maybe not even a fax could be—or email it over—I mean, it was a different time in history, and so we would wait because we serve you. Our—the people of North Carolina were our boss. That's who we work for, so yeah, come on. We're not gonna close the door at five, come on. But, um, he had, um, he had actually received from President Ronald Reagan a certificate of service, nationally, having served longer than anyone in the country in public service. And then, when he received his, Strom Thurmond, from South Carolina, uh, surpassed Mr. Eure, only because he stayed in office longer [Brooks laughs].

[00:10:05]

Brooks: Mm. So what you made stay with job? What was it about that position that—

Pollard: Um, I looked at other things—uh, had some other opportunities, but what made me stay—for me it couldn't get any better than that. I did personally look in—look at Washington. I went to Washington. Several of my friends went to Washington. Um, I would go to Washington, D.C., and I looked at that very closely—to work on the Hill—to work on Capitol Hill. In fact, Marion Morgan worked in our capital office, I me—again we had people coming and going in there, and that's life. Um, it happens. And she was working on the Hill in Washington, and I went up there, and I looked, and I had a good time, came back to Raleigh, and I said, Brenda, you can do two things. You can be a fi—a small fish—in a big pond in Washington, or maybe a big fish in a small pond. And I chose to stay in Raleigh, um, for all kinds of reasons. Um, in those days—and I don't know now because I haven't been up there—I mean, I go, but not in the lieu of an interview and career path—um, Marion's small closet-size apartment—I mean both couldn't get in without—we both couldn't stand side by side because we couldn't go through [laughs] through the room, but still she had an apartment. But I'll never forget the ten deadbolts on the door. And I said, "Marion, ten deadbolts?" "Yes! Lock 'em, lock 'em, lock 'em, lock 'em, lock 'em," and all night long was sirens and police and—

Brooks: Yeah. Not for you?

Pollard: Didn't seem to be my lifestyle. Transit, hustle-bustle, and most of my friends who went to DC were burned—literally—burned out in five years. Literally. They burned out, and they came home. It's such fast pace, and it's exciting now. But I just decided what was best for me at that time, and it's all about choices, and you make 'em, and you live with 'em. You live with 'em. Um, no regrets, but it just

seemed that I was learning and growing, and that my school—Mr. Eure taught school. He would call it his freshman Eure class. He was E-u-r-e. He would, when the new members to the General Assembly would come—and he had been a member, and so had his father—and he said, "I'm gonna teach you. I'm gonna teach you as a freshman. And mainly, listen, and then you ask your questions, as freshman." Um, he would teach for one week, and they would learn a lot about what they needed to know. And his siblings were teachers, and I would say, "Mr. Eure, you missed your calling. Why don't you—you should be a teacher 'cause that's what you love, but yet you are doing it, Mr. Eure," and I would debate with him, and I would say, "Mr. Eure, you need to write a book," and I'd say, "Please"—I mean I was begging—"Write a book about the ten reasons you think you've been successful in public service. Just ten of 'em. Give me five of 'em. Um, one of 'em, so that others behind you—students, um, graduate students, anyone—can read your book of success that you've had and model it or take something from it." And he said, "I'm not gonna do it," and I'd say, "Why?" And we would just have that debate. And he said, "Well, I'll tell you Brenda. If I do a book, and I say in that book something about Ellen's parents, and she says 'That's not my parents. That's not who they are,' it would be misconstrued. I'm not gonna do it. I'm not comfortable writing a book, at all." And he wasn't ever gonna do it. I mean, once he said no—that's what was so unprecedented—when he tapped me as his executive assistant. It's remarkable. And I think he was proud then, once he, once he crossed that—crossed over to that decision—he was good with it. He was introducing me and sending me into more opportunity to represent him and to be his surrogate—I was swearing people in, 'cause I was a notary, and I can do that. A notary can swear people in. So he would send me—'cause he would have five events at once, and he couldn't do it all, so he needed some surrogates—and so he would send me and other staff members when he couldn't go to something, just as people do today. But he was comfortable with that. I was his executive assistant, and I would go and do.

[00:15:20]

But, um, he never wrote the book; however, we had an intern in the office, his name was Casey Jones [sp?]. He was a Morehead Scholar at Chapel Hill—University of North Carolina—and he worked with us—he was an intern—and Mr. Eure wanted him—and I'm so glad he did—he wanted Casey to come in, but Casey was doing—as you're doing; as we're doing—Casey did an interview with Mr. Eure. That interview is now public. It had to sit in the archives for twenty-five years. Why? Because anything said, perhaps most people have passed away. And so, that's sort of the box to check is, Let's wait twenty-five years and then open this up in the Southern collection at Chapel Hill. So Casey Jones, um, worked with us. Um, a terrific young man. Later became, uh—I think he went up to Richmond, Virginia, uh, to their—I think it's a—he became a minister, even though he wanted to practice law, so it was a—he was from the mountains of North Carolina. A very unique, special person, and really Mr. Eure valued his input greatly. Seminary—he went on to the seminary. So, um, you just—every

day you went into that workplace was different. From the janitor to and ex-president of the United States. You just never knew who you were gonna talk to. You just never knew what was gonna happen that day. And no matter, as I just said—a janitor to a US president—everybody's equal. Everybody was treated the same in our office. And he had an open-door policy. The name plate, "Secretary of State," was on the inside of the door. The door never closed because it belonged to the people of North Carolina. He said one time he was—a governor came in—he didn't say which, 'cause he served about ten of 'em. He stayed the same; that door revolved. There was a new governor every four years, and Mr. Eure kept staying in his office and being re-elected and re-elected because he was doing the right job. As the people thought, he's been doing the job. So he went to the governor's office, and the governor said, "Close the door"—actually the governor came to Mr. Eure's office, and he said, you know, "We need to close the door." He said, "We need to go to your office. I'm not closing the door. This is open. This is an open door." So, quite extraordinary.

Brooks: Mm-hm. So, if you had to write that book, and you wanted to write about what Mr. Eure taught you in terms of how to be successful, what were some lessons that you took away from him?

Pollard: Let people—and this is what he did beautifully—and he had, as I said, a hundred people. He liked to keep it around a hundred. He didn't want to go to the General Assembly because he had been in the General Assembly. He knows that it's the tax dollars—we don't wanna use them unless we have to use them. So he wanted to maintain that level of excellence. He—if you were doing your job—he let you do your job. Now, if you needed his help, he was there—as he likes to say, "I'll help push the green button. I'll push the gree—the go button. If you need me, I'm here for you, but I'm gonna let you do your job. I trust you enough, 'cause you're actually representing me and my department, wherever you are 'cause I'm the elected official and people entrusting me to run this the way they want it." So he taught me, um, as a pretty much—and that—if I can reference my father's mother—she would always refer to Mr. Eure as the red bow tie man, 'cause Mr. Eure always wore a red bow tie. He had one he was wearing and one he was washing [laughs], and he would sign his name in green, and that's a story that I've learned about. But she would always reference him—they was pretty much the same age—the same generation—and having grown up on the farm, she was one of my—she was my grandmother, but she was a mentor of mine—an advisor of mine. And then when I transferred to Raleigh and began to work with Mr. Eure, it was like the farm. I had just transitioned the same generation, same mindset, same work ethic. You work. You do your job, and you do it, hopefully, the right way. And what he taught was, like I maybe I mentioned before, we had to dot the i's, we had to cross the t's. His letters—he would sign them—in fact, he would dictate, and I would take those in shorthand—but as time progressed, I would write them, and he would sign them. Because I pretty much knew how he was going to craft a response.

[00:21:02]

Uh, he taught me, You can say it in one page. You don't have to say it in two. Brevit—be brief. Um, be your best. Try to look your best. It doesn't have—it's not about the cost of the best and spending the most, it's just, Try to be your best. Um, treat people like you wanna be treated, and we believed in, if the phone was ringing, get on the first ring—at least on the second. I mean, just—just value people and serve them. And that's what he tried to do, and I think he wanted that in his staff, and particularly he, um, would talk to me. There were times he would talk with me—he had two children. Thad, Jr., who opened a restaurant in town called the Angus Barn, which is quite famous in the country. It's one of the top-ten steakhouses. Uh, his son didn't go into government. He went into the restaurant industry. And Mr. Eure had a daughter that lived in Durham, and, um—but there were times when Mr. Eure would sit, not just with me, one-on-one, but anyone that wanted that guidance.

I remember Governor Jim Hunt, when he—his first term; he did four—he came to the capital, and he said, "Mr. Eure, where do you think I should hold my office: in the capitol or the administration building?" His first term. And Mr. Eure didn't hesitate. He said, "You know, the governor—when the people come to Raleigh, they expect to see their governor in the capitol. I would say you come to the capitol." And then Governor Hunt did. He came. Now, Governor [James] Holshouser preferred to be in the administration building, and he would hold People's Day on Friday. He would have people come to the capitol and sign-in and visit with him. So, to go back—to circle back—to the things that he taught me, um, I think have goals, try to attain those, have purpose, have passion, have that energy, uh, and never forget, you know, even like he always would say to me, "I have a boss, too, Brenda: the people." So it's just about—it's about other people. It's not about you.

Brooks: Mm. And so, you mentioned a little bit about when you first got started about kind of learning who everybody was and the transition and all that, but, um, I'm wondering what are some of the bigger challenges you faced throughout your eighteen years?

[00:24:12]

Pollard: I think the bigger challenges was, like we mentioned, he was adding more, um, to my responsibility list. And he also assigned—in those later years, he said, "Brenda, if one of—if the other young lady leaves for marriage, or another job opportunity, or maybe to take care of her parents, or whatever, and they leave, you are going to hire. You are going to hire that person. And if there's any problems or issues, uh, that's your problem. That's not mine. You deal with it [laughs]." So the level of responsibility, um, was not challenging—I have to say that—but do-able. But I had also developed relationships in—like in—staff at the governor's office. I would go to them, and I'd say, "How are you managing such-

and—you know—such-and-such? And how do you do this with, um—how do we organize, and how do we get this done very quickly for the people?" And the they would share. They would share their tips with me, which is worth its weight in gold. Because if the governor was handling it this way and their staff—and they would share that kind of success with me. So and yeah. But you have to have—you have to be willing—to take those opportunities. You have to be willing to take those risks and to step outside and humble yourself and say, "I need help." You have to. Can't do it by yourself.

Brooks: Mm-hm. Yeah. So did you—you said you wanted to follow Mr. Eure out—that was your plan. Did you know what you wanted to do next?

Pollard: I didn't know when that was going to occur, so you really—I really didn't have an, as a vision, plan B. Why did I think he was gonna live forever? He did too. Um, he, um—he was so successful in every campaign. I worked on his campaigns. I mean, separate from the office, he also had a campaign. He had to campaign for re-election, so I also wore that hat off-hours. So I learned a lot of campaign information working with him and how to do that statewide. Um, but to answer the question about—you were asking—can you rephrase?

Brooks: Yeah. Just kind of—I was wondering if you had considered what your next steps would be beforehand or if you just left and figured it out then?

Pollard: No, when he—he called me in, and he said, "Brenda, we need to talk." We're always talking. Again there's that relationship of an executive assistant. He said, "Brenda, I wanna talk with you because"—and he's talked with other people, not just me—he said, "I'm gonna—I'm gonna retire. I want to walk out of this office, not be carried out. I don't wanna be in the box." And that's the box that you might carry someone to the grave in, and then there's the ballot box. So, you know, to run for re-election, you have to think about a lot of things, and he was thinkin' about things, and he said, "I'm just perfectly ready." I said, "Okay." So, I said, "I wanna walk out when you walk out your final time." Then I had to—which was an honor—when he decided to do that, um, there was a campaign, and Rufus Edmisten won that seat—secretary of state. Some people had asked me to run, and I became a candidate to fill the vacancy. It was an open seat. He always—Mr. Eure always—advised me, if I want to run for office, he wouldn't suggest I run against the incumbent because you just are chall—it's more challenging. But if it's an empty seat, go for it! So there was an empty seat, so I looked at that. Uh, I actually announced to run, had a media conference at the Goodwin House, which is the headquarters for the party—for the Democratic Party—but after announcing it, it became clear to me that I was not quite ready, at that time, to run, even though there was a lot of support and a lot of encouragement to run because I'd had the years and years and years of knowledge—still do. It's a constitutional office. It hasn't changed. Only the people can change it with an amendment to it, so the duties and the responsibilities are the same as it was when I—when we were there—so I still know what they are.

[00:29:50]

Um, but just looking ahead, I was on the transition team. Mr. Eure had placed me and the chief of staff to be on the transition team for the new secretary of state. So I'm working with that team and transitioned—I worked with the transition—but it occurred to me that I wasn't staying with the new secretary of state. He had his own team. So I began the process, after eighteen and a half year, walking the shoe leather again, and we come full circle. And I had eighteen and a half years, plus some private work I had—I mean, twenty years of experience. So I interviewed for the executive assistant of commissioner of insurance, Jim Long, and remember I told you they were starting to give these positions to women. She was leaving—some other opportunities for her—and so there was a vacancy in that position. I interviewed for it—three hours. I had a three-hour interview. I've never forgotten that. Three hours. And I was hired. So I became the executive assistant to the commissioner of insurance, Jim Long, and he always referenced himself—he wore a red tie—not a bow tie—but a red tie.

Brooks: There's a theme there. A little pattern [laughs].

Pollard: Well, the pattern for him—two patterns. He wanted to be the Thad Eure of insurance, but he was the state fire marshal, hence the red. And so he wore a red tie, and he signed his name in red. My—Mr. Eure—signed his name in green, and that's a story, and I want to share it now. I said, "Mr. Eure, why do you sign in green?" "Well, I'll tell you why." And this is what he told me—now he may have told someone else something else—but, as a young man he was in New York, and he was working—uh, volunteering—and was with a delegate to the DNC—to the Democratic National Convention—and they were in New York, and that delegate said, "Do you wanna go meet Governor Roosevelt—Franklin Roosevelt—of New York?" He said, "Sure." "And you wanna meet Eleanor?" "Sure." So they went and knocked on the door, Eleanor Roosevelt came to the door in her kimono, and she welcomed them in. He met Governor Roosevelt, and he met his manager—his campaign manager. His campaign manager signed something for Mr. Eure in green. He said, "I'm gonna take that idea home with me [laughs]." And when he came back to North Carolina, he always signed in green. So, [Brooks laughs] the famous green ink—and he went through gallons of green ink, and boxes of green felt pens [Brooks laughs], and stamps with green—you know, he'd have stamps with his name, and he'd stamp that green ink—so he [both laugh]—that's what he wanted to do. But, anyway. So my vision, my pathway, led me—I really had, in my heart, to leave Raleigh and start anew in Chapel Hill. What was I thinking? [both laugh] I went to interview with the Kenan Institute at Chapel Hill [Kenan-Flagler Business School]. It's a business—it's the MBA school—master's of business administration. I really wanted to be on the campus—I still wanna be on that campus life—and I interviewed, and I really wanted to be at that institute and learn something new—learn something fresh. I'm al—I think you need that in life. No matter your age, you need to learn and stay constant and always grow, if you

can. Learn something new because we can learn something every day and learn about yourself. And so I interviewed, and what box I couldn't check was I wasn't a graduate there.

So as it turned out, that door closed, but the window opened with Jim Long, commissioner of insurance. So I was thrilled to have that opportunity with him. He taught me a lot as well. He said, "Brenda, there's life. Don't sit on the sidelines of life. Get in the game and play. Now, people gon' tell you 'You did wrong.' But some people you did good, but that's called life. Get in there. Don't sit on the side. Get in and play." And that's what I've tried to do, and he was just instrumental in telling me, "Do something, Brenda"—this was Jim Long—"If it's wrong—so many times people are paralyzed; they won't do anything for fear it's wrong—it's no right or wrong, just do something." And when he said that to me, it just freed—it's freeing.

[00:35:30]

It really lifts a lot off your shoulders. And let me reference Mr. Eure while I'm talking about that for a moment. He taught me a great deal about life. He described life—Mr. Eure—as being at the ocean, and you go out in the ocean, and the waves gonna knock ya down and spin you around. Life's gonna knock you down, and the wave is gonna knock you down, but get back on and ride it again. Just ride it again. Um, people are like the wind. One day they're with you; the next day they're not. They blow just like the wind. And you have to understand that. And he also shared with me, and sometimes with just tears in my eyes, and he'd say, "Don't cry, 'cause I'm telling you this for your good, and 'cause I want you to know because I'm not gonna be here with you always. I want you to know two things. Some people are not gonna like the way you part your hair." And I looked—I said, "Well, I'm not quite sure what you mean." [laughs] He said, "I mean, they're never gonna like you." I said, "Well, I haven't even talked to 'em. Give me a chance." He went, "Listen to me. They just—they have judged you, and there is a saying—there's that first impression. And they just aren't gonna like you. The point is move on to the next person. Be around the people who support you—who don't tear you down. There's both, so be there for that." And he always, uh, anything he could say to me—and then finally, I can remember, oh, there were so many discussions. He'd say, "Now, Brenda, I'm on the—life's a stage—and I'm on the edge of life. I'm on the edge of life. [crying?] I'm gonna help you up. Now when, it's your turn, and you're on the edge—" and I said, "I'm not there yet, [laughs] Mr. Eure." He'd said, "Help someone younger up on the stage." You know, help people. And so I have become a mentor to men and to women—to young men and to young women. I've tried to honor that promise, uh, and pledge that I honored, and kind of in close and when Mr. Eure was very sick, he asked that I come to his hospital bedside, and his family were with me when I was there. My husband was with me, and he said, "Brenda, let me do the talking. I want you to promise me [pause, audibly emotional]. I've taught you a lot." He was dying. He said, "I've taught you a lot. I want you to promise me that you will carry it on.

I want you promise that you will carry it on." I said, "I promise you that I will." Now, I made that same commitment to my parents. My father said, "Brenda, do all you can." And he didn't mean to cuss—we don't like to cuss or use foul language—he said, "Brenda, do one thing. Do all you can not to go to war. It is hell, honey. If you can do that in your life, fight not to go to war." Because he had been in war. He'd seen the hell. He'd lived it. That's why he couldn't talk about it. That's why he couldn't understand, Why was he able to come home? I think a lot of veterans feel like that. Why did they get—why were they selected to come home? It's almost a—and I don't wanna use, They're feeling guilty about it—but—

Brooks: Well, it's survivor's guilt.

[00:40:00]

Pollard: —it's a survivor's guilt. And so my father would ask of me, and I've tried to honor him, and I've tried to be extremely active. I'm honored with the title of 2018 Democratic Woman of the Year. Democratic Women of North Carolina—that's the highest honor that they can bestow on one of their members. And there's over 3,000 members that could be chosen, one. And so, with that, I've tried, in my adulthood, give back, to serve, to mentor. All the things that I've tried—that's been given to me—and to much that is given, much is expected to be given back. So that's what I'd like. Not that I'm [laugh] leaving a legacy, but that's what I'd like to leave. That I've had a little small part, um, to help people—particularly young people—because it's their time. And then they can pay it forward.

Brooks: Um, well this is jumping ahead a little bit, but since you mentioned it, um, tell me about finding out that you were nominated. Or how does that—did you find out you were nominated?

Pollard: The process—there's a process. I had found out that I—well, you're nominated, um, within your county. And, um, you have to have a letter of nomination. There's a protocol. You have to meet criteria. You have to meet—I think you have to have been a member for five years. You have to check a lot of boxes. You've gotta be engaged in your county, in your region, in your district, in your states, and some—I've done some national. I've been very blessed, so I've done national. Um, so there's a lot of boxes to check, and then you have to get endorsements from folks, and, um, I had actually been told that I had been nominated before. There're a lot of qualified women. A lot of qualified women. So, but it just hadn't come to me, you know, the name had been put there in front of the committee. There's a chairman and two committee members. They are—the chairman is always the woman who has won it, okay, and then the president of the organization will appoint two, and those two are former winners. In other words, this group are former women of the year people that have won. So, the applicants—the nominees—come in to the committee, and they review them, and, uh, last year—or, excuse me, this year, 2019—I was the chair, and I had two other former

winners, and we had two applicants, um, and they had checked all the boxes, and it was almost a stalemate of, Well let's just have co-winners, which is just unprecedented. And I said, as chair, "Let's take a lunch break and come back, and let's review this one final time—or maybe more than once—but understandably, one of these applicants and nominees has checked more boxes than the other one, respectfully. And, um, let's come back and look at these boxes that's been checked by one of these," and there's more boxes, as we looked closer. So having said that, we call—it was a conference call—and I called them, and I said, "Have we studied and looked at it a little—I mean—are we good to take a vote now?" And it was unanimous who was gonna win it as we looked closer. So, the point I'm making is, this is not taken lightly. Um, this is a forever-honor that can't be taken away. So we—the committee—is very, very serious about it because the nominee—the people behind that person—wants to know why. Because we felt that all the boxes had been checked—and they had—but not—some more were even more. There were even more boxes checked for some. And that was the winner. And so, maybe that other applicant or nominee can maybe win 2020.

Brooks: Yeah. Great. So how did you feel when you found out that you won 2018? [laughs] Don't spit your water out [laughs].

[00:44:51]

Pollard: [laughs] Pardon?

Brooks: I said, "Don't spit your water out." You swallowed.

Pollard: [laughs] Well you don't know. Uh, there's a banquet, and my banquet was held in Wilmington, at the hotel. I think it's called Riverside, but that night, um, the chairman goes up to the podium and to the mic, and she said—and they read a biog—they read a profile—a biography—and you're just going along, and most boxes have been checked, and you go, Well yeah, she's been the president, and, She's been a director of her region, and, Yeah, wonder who that is [laughs]. But when they said, "She was the executive assistant—"

Brooks: Yeah.

Pollard: Yeah. "—to the secretary of state." I went—I mean, there used to be a TV show called "What's My Life" or—what was the name of that—anyway it was a T—you know, "What's My Li"—and it was sort of like that TV show where you get these people coming in, and you just are sitting there listening to all that they're saying about what you've done in your life, and it's just been opportunities that's been given to you by others, okay? Some of it you can navigate for yourself, but a lot of it people helping. In other words, the turtle doesn't get on the ledge by himself. He's put—he's helped there. And so I've been helped by so many people. I have had so much—so many mentors—and let me mention that. The secretary of state was a mentor. Jim Graham, the commissioner of agriculture, was one of

my mentors, and Harlan Boyles—uh, was the state treasurer—he was a mentor. Why do I say that with such passion and honor? These—in those days there was not a woman on the council of state—so they would mentor me, and they would give me five minutes of their schedule, which was all they had, but they would put me in on one of the days that I could come in and get their advice—get their thoughts about things that I needed to know about—and they were guided and directing me. And it's unprecedented. Most women mentored women, but I had male mentors in my career, which is unprecedented, and so I have to mention them because they gave me their time to talk to me and to advise me on public service because they—that's what they were doing.

Um, but as far as getting that honor, I, um, felt like Jim Valvano, who was the coach at NC State, and he won a national title, and if you ever look at the video, he's running like a chicken with its head cut off looking for somebody to hug. I just wanted to hug somebody. I just—and they don't usually give that recipient the microphone [Brooks laughs], but I made a commitment to me: if I ever won it, I had to have the microphone [Brooks laughs]. And they gave me the microphone. I took [laughs] personal privilege. I thanked God first, then I thanked my husband, who had—I couldn't do this without him—he earned most of it because he sacrificed. No dinner. Where are you going now, another meeting? You're not gonna be home? What are we—wait where's my laundry? I mean, aren't you going with me to this? He sacrificed so much. And then I thank my family—my parents—who are not here. So I had to say those things. And then, when I won it, it was a clock. It was a clock—a mantle clock—with my name engraved and the year. And what I felt like was the Super Bowl, and with the Super Bowl—when you win the Super Bowl—they pass it and everybody gets to kiss it, so I took my clock table to table that night, and I had everybody touch the clock to just embrace it because I shared it with them. It is not mine. This honor is—could be—it's all of us together. It's a collection of all of the hard work into this one clock. And I thank you for that. And I just went everywhere [laughs] with my clock, and the younger Democrats said, "Mrs. Pollard put a chain on your clock and you'll be a rapper," [laughs] and they got into the clock [laughs], and they enjoyed it. And that was exciting for me. I just—I just wanted to let them understand that I just value this more than they know. Um, I just still do.

[00:50:09]

But the lady that won it this year is Barbara Faison. She has—she's a national leader now. She's the Southern Regional Director for the Federation of Democratic Women. She's got thirteen states that she's over. She has been a past state president, a region director. I mean, she's checked all the boxes, and she—she deserved the award. But she—we decided to do a silver tray with her name to kind of give it her luster. It was her year. Uh, we could have done the clock, but it was our discretion, and we decided that we would give her something, um, that was hers that she could hopefully enjoy.

Brooks: Yeah. That's great. So, um, I just want to make sure that we're caught up in terms of your career. So you had—how long were you with Jim Long? Approximately? It doesn't have to be exact.

Pollard: Mm, two years, three years, approximately.

Brooks: Okay, and what was after that?

Pollard: Well, after that, uh, my husband and I decided, as we had gotten married later in life—I was thirty-four and he was thirty-seven—that we wanted to plan our family—and that I'm—as they say, The clock is ticking. And I was having, um, some health issues. I actually will talk about it now. I had endometriosis. I think that's something that—you know, there's a saying in the Bible, Lift the bushel basket off the issue, off the topic. Put the light on it. It's difficult to talk about it at times because, in my opinion, every woman would like to be a mother. It's innate that we reproduce. That's what women like—some women—like to do. They like—they want to. They wanna have that child, um—so did I. But what happened in—I can remember the commissioner—I had gone to lunch and come back from lunch during my career with him, and he said, "Brenda, you need to go home," and I looked at him, 'cause I was not feeling well—I'd been to the ladies room, and I wasn't feeling well, and I didn't—I was in a lot of pain, um, in my lower body, a lot of pain in my stomach and so forth—but I just thought it would pass along. But I was just white as a piece of cotton. My face—I had no color in my face. He said, "You need to go home, and that's fine if you leave right now." 'Cause most of the time the boss is saying, "You need to stay late," not, "Go home," and he was very, very compassionate. So, I'd had to have some surgeries to remove the endometriosis, uh, to save my life. Um, children would be secondary for me. My doctor in evaluating and doing the surgery—I had to have a laparoscopy to remove the endometriosis because it was wrapping itself around the lower—uh, my colon—it was wrapping itself around the colon and cutting off my life. And if you don't remove it, you'll die. You die. So my doctor, Dr. Karen Clark—terrific—she did a—we did—an office visit, and she thought she knew what was happening with me 'cause we were trying to plan our family, and it wasn't happening. And we were looking at a lot of different things, and she did an exam, and she said, "We've got to do a laparoscopy." And when you do that—when you go into that situation—you're gonna go into a clinic, pretty much an outpatient. You're gonna have mild, moderate, and severe. If you wake up, you could be in the hospital setting, which means a lot of issues. Fortunately, I woke up in the clinic, but [laughs] having gone through that I said to the nurses, "I would like a new car," [both laugh] when I came out of the anesthesia. "I wanna new car and a fur coat and some bling." And they told my husband, "She's delirious. She really is. She's asking for a lot of things." He went, "No, that's Brenda. She's [laughs]—she wants all those things." [laughs] But you just feel like, what you've been through, you've earned something on the other side of it.

[00:54:46]

But a lot of women—in fact, Michelle Obama talked about it in her book, uh—the difficulty she and the president had to achieve—parents—to be parents—and what she went through. And I admire her talking about it. It is—it's a personal—it's very personal. 'Cause sometimes, and that's okay, people judge, and I'm always interested in men who say, "Well, you—why don't you have children?" And I'll look at them and say, "Well, I had endometriosis." "Oh, I know what that is. I know all about that." And, uh, I always like to know, How do you know, 'cause it's a female disease, but then they're pretty compassionate, mostly, in terms of learning. They want to know more than—I mean, once you open the door, then there's a lot of conversation. And there needs to be more. Um, so you really have to give that one hundred percent, and it's hard to have that career when you need to be somewhere in a clinic, doing some testing. So, um, I survived that. I survived that. But, um—

Brooks: Mm. So that w—so you were in your, like, late thirties or early forties at that point?

Pollard: Thirty-four.

Brooks: But so you were—you still would have been working with the—

Pollard: Well, I was with the commissioner, but then—

Brooks: But weren't you with—you started in like twenty—

Pollard: Well, yeah. I was nineteen when I started with Mr. Eure.

Brooks: So if that was eighteen years, that would have been—you would have been—like your thirties.

Pollard: And then—I was in the thirties—late thirties—when I was with the commissioner. Yeah.

Brooks: Yeah. Okay.

Pollard: And so that was why we had to start. And we were—

Brooks: Right. Clock. The clock.

Pollard: The clock, and—

Brooks: [laughs] Different kind of clock.

Pollard: —and the doctors going, "We don't know why, you know, 'cause you're doing everything we're discussing," and so forth, and then when she said, "Let's take

this—let's do this on exam," and that's when we discovered—and I've discussed it, um—I've actually had interviews. I've done letters to the editor on it—not massively and aggressively—because five million are affected, and it's a disease called endometriosis. Um, it attacks women, no matter your economic status, um, Caucasian, Chinese, African American. It—there's—it's a gift from God, that's the only—and let me say that. In anything we go through, we praise him. Even in that, we glorify. Because, what you're going through, good or bad, he's always with you. So we—so that's what I do. That's how I have, um, taken the steps necessary. You just make lemonade out of lemons because, when you want something, and you're doing all you can to achieve that, it's just not working. It wasn't meant to be. So my husband and I have five godchildren, and we love 'em. We have a German foreign-exchange student that we had in our h—we had four foreign exchange students in our home—and one in particular is German, and she came to us when she was seventeen. Uh, she is now forty-eight. She is a wife. She is a doctor and a mother. And she has a daughter that's seventeen—same age as when she came—the point is, the daughter is my goddaughter. So I was there when she was born. So she's family. She's like my granddaughter, and they wanna come to visit us in March, next year.

So we are constantly talking with our godchildren, and I have, in closing, I have two adult godchildren that came to Larry and I—my husband and I. One young lady—my husband's an attorney, and he mentored her career in law school. And so when she was forty, she said, "Please, I wanna ask you. Will you be my godparents?" And of course we will. So we're there for her. And then, my husband's older brother passed away, but he had a godson, and so when he passed away that godson is something—forty-five—he asked my husband, Would he be his godfather? So we have a lot of family. We have a lot. And it's like my pastor said: family is different for everybody. Different for everybody.

[01:00:00]

Brooks: Yeah. So at what point in your career did you announce that you were running—that you started your campaign?

Pollard: Uh, when the secretary decided not to run, it was a vacancy for his—

Brooks: Okay.

Pollard: Yes. When the secretary of state, Thad Eure, decided not to run in the early nineties, there was a vacancy.

Brooks: And then you kind of decided that you weren't ready for that role?

Pollard: Yeah, I looked at it; I thought I was ready—had a lot of encouragement to do it—um, but I wasn't feeling it. And I can hear [laughs] my father's mother—my grandmother—saying, "Who talked you into it, honey?" [laughs] I said,

"Nobody." [laughs] 'Who talked you into it?' And so, then time passed, and the Rufus—Rufus occupied the seat—Rufus Edmisten—but then he decided not to run, so it became an open seat again. I said, "Now's my time. Now I'm ready." And I was probably forty-six. Um, I was ready then. I wanted to do it then, and I can remember going to the board of elections—the North Carolina Board of Elections—and they said—'cause we used to have to turn in all the certificates of certification from the members who had won—we would prepare those for the board, so I knew the staff. And so I went down to sign in and to file, and they went, "You don't have to do it. You don't have to do this, Brenda." Why are they saying that? Because they know what's ahead. It's—if it's easy, everybody would do it. And they said, "You don't have to do it, Brenda." I said, "Oh, yes I do." That was the time I had to do it. And I did it, and I ran for secretary of state.

Um, Elaine Marsh—that was 1996—Elaine Marshall got the most votes. Valeria Lynch Lee got the second most, and Brenda Pollard got the third most. First time I'd ever run for anything, and I went statewide. And I remember it was around Christmas time when I had to decide to file, and I was on my knees—I can still see the manger scene in front of me—and I'm saying, "God, why me? Why?" I could just feel this, Do it. And I said, "I'm gonna do it," and I did it. And the more I did it, the more energy I got, um. And I didn't win, but people said, "Brenda you act like"—I mean, the point was I did win. You win by running. You win by letting people know, Who are you? And if you ever become a candidate, you will know, it will define you—who you are. Because the questions come at you, and there was one time I was answering something, and I said, "I don't know. I'm still studying this issue. I will have to say 'No' right now. This is who I am." And when I came out of the meeting, some people came to me, and they said, "We're voting for you," and I said, "Well, great!" They said, "We're voting for you 'cause you didn't say what we wanted to hear. You just didn't say, 'Well, I'm gonna do that.' You weren't sure. You hadn't studied it as much as you wanted to study it, so we're voting for you." I said, "Well, I appreciate it." So you know who you are.

And, in closing, don't sell your soul. It's not worth it. Don't sell your soul. That's all you got. It's not for sale. Be who you are. You have a purpose. You're here every day, um, to accomplish that. And a lot of time I like to say that, "You're just an opening act," and I have to say it, "For Jesus." He's the purpose. We're just an opening act. We're here for a greater purpose than us, and that's for him. And that's my faith. 'Cause this, to me, is just a holding room. Um, I have a lot of family: my father, my mother, my sister, my—no aunts and uncles left on either side—um, we're now losing cousins—first cousins—and, I mean, it is life. We are born, and we're gonna die, but we have to—uh, this is my faith, again—that there is another day, and I wanna be on that other day.

Brooks: What—what advice do you think you would give, particularly women who might be intimidated by getting into—the idea of—getting into politics or government? You can't really get into government without some politics.

[01:04:56]

Pollard: I think you need to look at the issue or issues that you're passionate about. You're not gonna—there's so many of them—but if you can just narrow it down, and that is something—if it's school board and you wanna save the children, save 'em, teach 'em, help 'em. They're our future. If it's crime control, or if you wanna get in there and save the, you know, save all the—help the police—be passionate about that. So find your cause; find your passion, but I will say you need—you have to have the support—of family friends. You can't—you just can't do it by yourself. And it shouldn't be about yourself. It should be about—the voice you bring to the table is not your voice—that's what's gotta be—it's not your voice. You're there for everybody else, and you've gotta hear them. Listeners are leaders. [laughs] Maybe that's not my forte, but listeners are leader. "What's troubling y'all?" And, "Let me be that voice. If I can make a difference for y'all"—and however that is, that's what I would advise women to do. It's not—you know, so many doors have been opened for women. Um, when I ran in 1996, I was the first woman to file for that secretary of state. I filed it. Then we had two men and four other women. We had another Brenda in the race. I had never—she's from Greensboro—I didn't even—I'd never heard of her. I had never heard of Valerie Lynch Lee—had never heard of her before and haven't heard of her since. Uh, that's what happens, but, um, people get in and get out. And some people get into races—some women get in—and they're—I don't—not disillusioned—when they don't win. They go home. They pack up their bag and leave. I haven't left. Winning is icing on the cake, but you can't win everything. You learn by failures. You learn when you don't win. You learn a little more about who you are, and well, gosh, let's see where we can go from here. And maybe we shouldn't, but what disturbs me is women have something of value to offer to the table. We need a balance, and we need their voice, but some women will get into politics and public service, and if they don't win that one time, they're finished. There's more t—there's just more involved in that. Don't go home. Get—just re-group [laughs].

Brooks: Is that not true of men, though? There're men that—who—run and lose and go home?

Pollard: I think it's a different mindset for men. Um, I think they—I think their pathway to get in—it's just a different strategy for them. Um, I've seen—in my journey I've seen more—I've just seen more women, regrettably, for me, get in and get out. I've seen men get in, and I've seen 'em get out, but I've seen 'em come back. In a—maybe in a different office—maybe the one they chose was not the right one. And not to say that men and women should be in the same place. It is a personal decision, truly, and a great deal of sacrifice—not just for them, but for their families—I can tell you. A lot of sacrifice for a lot of people.

Brooks: Yeah. Um, anything else about your career that we haven't touched on that you want to cover?

Pollard: I'm just—

Brooks: That's okay [laughs].

Pollard: I'm just thinking, um.

Brooks: Scrolling through the resume [laughs].

Pollard: I'm rolling through it in my head 'cause I didn't have it in front of me. Um, are we taped? Or are we quiet?

Brooks: I can pause it if you want me to?

Pollard: Yeah.

Brooks: Yeah. Alright, so we're gonna talk a little bit about, um, moving to Durham.

Pollard: Yes.

Brooks: Transitioning to Durham.

[01:09:55]

Pollard: And that occurred—actually, um, I moved to Durham on June 1, 1985—that's when I got married and moved to Durham, but I continued my career in Raleigh. But having the opportunity to work with Commissioner of Insurance Jim Long—and then it was decided that Larry and I needed to focus on our personal life. And I needed to actually have some surgeries to correct the disease of endometriosis and to save my life. So we just decided it was time for me to come home full-time and devote that time and energy to my health. So, moving forward, Larry is an attorney, and who thought—and everybody said, "Don't do this. Don't become his executive assistant," and I haven't, but I do brief him just like I would brief the commissioner and brief the secretary. We, um, talk a lot, and he has his own law firm. He is with himself, and I work with Larry on that, so that's what I've done for thirty-four years—is work with my husband Larry in his firm. And we are the firm. So that was transitioning full-time back to Durham, and that's what I've been doing.

But I've also interspersed a community of Durham—and the state, actually—in being more active in public service on the state level, and national level, and county level. And it's actually been surreal, in a way. I was selected and appointed by Governor Jim Hunt to serve him during his tenure on the banking commission. I was a commissioner with his appointment—enjoyed it immensely. When he left the office, Governor Mike Easley re-appointed me to the banking commission—enjoyed it, worked hard. It was monthly, and all in between we had to read documents after documents even before we had our meetings. And if you came to

the meeting, and you were late, you had an asterisk beside your name, and I'm so proud to say I never an asterisk. I always arrived about an hour early so that, you know, with the traffic that we have in Raleigh, you don't wanna be late and have an asterisk. The asterisks just means you were not there to take the vote, and there was some explanation as to why. And then, in closing, Governor Bev Perdue came into office when Governor Easley left. She re-appointed me to serve her on the banking commission. And so that was nine years on the banking commission. Uh, I got to see new banks. We watched 'em like infants—really wanted them to get up and going on their third year. We gave them three years to get up and going and help the people in this state. And, you know, a lot of people—and I didn't know exactly, but—sadly, in a way, men are more fragile than women in terms of health, and there's more wealth in this country and in this state, and it's women who own the wealth because, sadly, sometimes their husbands pass away first. So we had to have the voice, and I was thrilled to be, perhaps at times, the only female voice on the commission, and I appreciate Governor Hunt appointing me so that women had a voice on that, with the banking commission.

But, uh, Governor Perdue—my term had expired because I had completed the term limit—so nine years was unprecedented. She said, "Well, I want you to serve me on two other opportunities. I want you to serve me on natural sciences advisory—I want you to advise me on that—and I want—also want—you on the architecture board." And I said, "Yes ma'am, you're the governor. Whatever you want. I would be honored to serve you." So I served her in those capacities. And then, lastly, this governor, currently is Governor Roy Cooper, and, um, last year he re-appointed me to serve him as an advisor on the natural sciences, so I am honored to do that. We are—actually under the Obama administration—the natural sciences museum received a national distinction as the best museum in natural sciences in the country. So we are very much involved and hands-on in advising the legislature. We do a lot of great work in terms of—we had just recently some round-table discussions where we hope that the museum can offer a dialogue with civil rights, where we can come together in an environment that seems compatible to talk about how we can all work together and should work together.

[01:15:42]

Brooks: That's a lot [laughs].

Pollard: Mm. Mm. Mm.

Brooks: You stay busy.

Pollard: I do [Brooks laughs]. I do stay busy. Um, in fact, tomorrow I've been invited to give the invocation—um, I'm a chaplain—I'm a daughter of the American Revolution. Five years ago I was talking with my mother before she passed, and she said, "Brenda, what are you doing now?" And I said, "Well mother, I'm going

over to the library. They're gonna start a new chapter for DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution], and I wanna be a part of something new, and be on the cusp of something very exciting. It's a—it will be the first in the history of the state to have a after five distinction. In other words, they're professional women—will come together for their meeting after five o'clock. It won't be a twelve-noon meeting because the professional women just can't do that in their workplace, so I wanna be a part of that, mother." And she said, "Well, I can't wait to hear more." Long story short, my mother did pass away, and the day after we buried my mother, I received the certificate from Washington, DC, affirming me as a daughter of the American Revolution. My father's lineage—uh, my father's seven-generations grandfather was a patriot. And I am a co-founder of the William Hooper DAR chapter, and they wanted me to be the chaplain five years ago when we started. You had to have twelve women to start the chapter, and we had to name the chapter, and we had—in fact, we had a woman patriot. There were women patriots. But William Hooper, as y'all know, had signed the Declaration of Independence, and his profile was longer than our arms, and he was from Hillsborough, Orange County. We really had no choice but to pick that name and that distinction, so we are the William Hooper chapter. We are invited, at Christmas, to go into his home in Hillsborough—there's new owners, but they have maintained his residence as a museum, as it were, and they've added another room for their private dining and private living quarters. So we get a chance to go where he lived and walk where he walked. But, um, this week and tomorrow, we have in Durham a crisis intervention team. In other words, there are so many crises and so many—sadly, our veterans have a lot of mental illness, um, a lot of suicides—a lot of different things that we're dealing with in society. And so the police and others, uh, try to intervene with these crises and diffuse these crises, so tomorrow there'll be a banquet to honor those who have sacrificed, at times, to do this, and I've been asked to give the invocation. The sheriff is Clarence Birkhead of Durham. He will be the keynote speaker. And I'm honored to be invited to do that tomorrow.

Brooks: Is your speech all ready? [both laugh] You've got time.

Pollard: I've got time. I've looked at—are we?

Brooks: We're still recording. Do you want me to pause it?

Pollard: Okay.

Brooks: Keep rolling.

[01:19:13]

Pollard: Oh. Um, what I wanted to add was the invocations—what I do is I google, and I look at invocations, and I put in 'crisis' and, I mean, topics of in—invocations are different messages, and what I do is I will look at those and print it out, and then I

will let it marinate, and then I will know that—let me reference my faith—because the words I give tomorrow will not be mine, they will be given to me—um, I'll just be given the words to say. The words be lifted from the page, and I'll know that's what I'm supposed to say tomorrow. Sometimes it comes at that very moment. But what I want them to understand is, when I deliver that, it's delivered individually to them, and that their purpose—to intervene in that crisis—in that situation—is their purpose. And they will be rewarded for that.

Brooks: That's great. That's great that you have, like, a method, and, you know—but you make it personal, um, for every event.

Pollard: And I had been invited last year to the banquet to observe, um—to watch another person do this, and [laughs] they did an excellent job. I don't know how I'm going to stand on their shoulders, but, um, it'll be fine, and you just never know, day-to-day, where things will lead you. And you just—I just feel led, and I try to follow that. Um, sometimes if you're fighting it, that's wrong—the wrong way. Just go with it because that's what you're supposed to be doing. Um, just like I shared with you, when I left the secretary's office—Thad Eure's office—I really—I really—wanted to work in Chapel Hill at the institute—the Kenan Institute [Kenan Flagler Business School]. I just had that desire, but that door closed, and this other door opened with Jim Long—commissioner of insurance—and that fit at that moment in time, for me.

Brooks: Mm-hm. Great. Do you want to talk at all about your other volunteer activities? Or—

Pollard: I think that would be something I need to share because it's a building block. Um, I'm very active in the Junior League of Durham and Orange County. I had, um, previously been in the Junior League of Wake County. That league is one of the top ten in membership in the country. You had to have—at those times—it's—in those days you had to have five women propose you to be a member. You had to be invited to be a member, and to get the five people to do that—they'd already committed theirself to other people, so it was a challenge to find it, but we did it. And I did that in 1985, and I was invited to come into the Junior League, and at the same time my husband asked me to marry him [Brooks laughs]. So at this point, now, I'm working full-time for the secretary of state; I am taking courses—when you're a member of the Junior League, you have to take courses every week as called an active member, and you have to take the classes in the Junior League in Raleigh. It's called provisional, active, and sustainer in all these chapters. When you are accepted into the league, you are a provisional, but you have to decide you want to learn the community or you wanna learn the inside and do some of the administrative duties inside the league. I chose to do out in the community, but you have to go in training. Every week you have to take a class and finish that, so I did that and planned my wedding. I had three things going at one time. But we got it done.

[01:23:49]

Also, I am a daughter of the American Revolution, co-founder of the William Hooper DAR chapter five years ago. We had twelve women that we needed to form the chapter. We had to decide on a name. We had several. We had a woman who was a patriot that we were leaning to; however, William Hooper was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, lived in Hillsborough, had accomplished so much. We really had very little choice but to choose his name for our chapter. Having said that, you hold lots of offices inside that chapter, and I've been a corresponding secretary. I'm now a chaplain with the DAR. That has opened many doors that I had never anticipated. With that, I feel at times—just very recently—this week—a young lady that I knew, uh, was at a meeting, and she had been away from the meeting for a while, and I went over and spoke to her, and she had—she'd had some very traumatic experiences, and, um, I asked if I could pray for her, and she said she would welcome it. So I'd been in restaurants where people come to me—and I can tell—that needed some private message. I've been in hospital waiting rooms, shopping malls. I mean, the point is, if you allow God to use you—you be obedient to him—and you gonna be involved in so much that you never dreamed and hopefully make a difference in someone's life—that they know they're loved and cared for—that they're not alone. So you have to be—and if I don't pray for them, then I don't know how to explain it other than I'm just gonna throw up. It's a—it's in your chest—you just—it explodes if you don't get the words out and be with that person. I had a gentleman who'd just lost his wife eighteen months ago, actually, and he was still grieving for her, and I asked if I could pray for him, and he said, "Yes, please," and we both were crying because he understood what I was trying to say to him is she's at peace, um, you need to understand that and to let that go, and it will—she would want you to know that she is—she'd okay. And he thanked me for that. It made a difference for him that day. So I'm just doing a small part, and I feel that I'm being asked to now bigger calling.

And so, um, that said, I'm again, as I like to say, recycled. I am the president of the Daylily Garden Club, and I had been the president, in Durham, of the Daylily Garden Club, and they came to me—the nominating committee—and they said, "Well, if you don't, we're just gonna fold," and I said, "I don't think it takes one person. I think we'll manage." But they said, "Brenda, please consider doing it." Because several—I'm okay standing in front of two people or two hundred people, and some women are not. That's okay. There are people that are behind the scenes, and there are people out in front. And I'm okay being out front and being out there and talking with people. So I'm currently the president of the Daylily Garden Club again, um, and involved in that. I'm involved in my church. I'm an usher. I take up the money, and when I go to other churches, and I see just men marching down with the plates, [Brooks laughs] I just wanna go get a plate [laughs] and go down to the front. It's still traditions held in many churches that women don't hold a place at the pulpit or even taking care of the money. So I'm just thrilled to be at Watts Street Baptist Church, where I can be of small service

to the community—the church family—and I been that for thirty-four years. So, um, we have a woman pastor, Doris Anne Cooper, and she's terrific. So the church is a wonderful place that my husband—I enjoy that.

[coughs] I wanted to share that the Junior League of Durham and Orange County honored me with Sustainer of the Year. Again, they select one of their own, who's been involved in junior league. I received that distinction maybe ten years ago, now. But it's an honor to be a part of that group of women. Um, I had been asked to chair sustainers three times. They kept asking me to continue and continue, and I enjoyed it. But let me share with you—if you know Duke University, then you know the name Mary Duke Semans Biddle [Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans]. Mrs Semans was a Sustainer of the Year. Mrs. Semans should be—I always felt like she should be—a super-Sustainer of the year [both laugh], but that's the people that I'm standing on their shoulders. Because she gave so much to the community, and now for me to have been selected as the Sustainer of the Year—also receive power—one—you know, one person can make a difference, and I received that honor as well and that distinction from a previous president in junior league. So it's a group of women who do great things in the community. They volunteer their time, and they try to make a difference in that.

[01:30:42]

Brooks: Great. Um, so I have—there are two questions that I try to ask everyone, um, for these interviews kind of to tie all the interviews together. Are we ready for those now?

Pollard: Well, let me think because I didn't bring my list. There was so many—'cause I could just list a lot of—like, I've been on the museum of history board. I mean do we really—I don't know that we need—

Brooks: It's really up to you. Um, I think it would be anything that you felt was formative or anything that you felt like that really, you know, stuck out to you.

Pollard: Yeah. Mm-hm. Oh, god—the State Capital Foundation. Can we come back and do the second part of this?

Brooks: We can do another interview.

Pollard: We might have to do another that. I think that would be great.

Brooks: Okay.

Pollard: That—'cause the State Capital Foundation—I've been on that for thirty-four years. That's a whole other interview. I mean, yeah, we might have to do that.

Brooks: Okay. Do you wanna do these two questions, just in case, so we'll have 'em down?

Pollard: Let's do these two questions. Yes. 'Cause I want—okay.

Brooks: Okay. So the first one is how do you define success?

Pollard: Well, I define success—if you've achieved treating people—it's all about people, for me—that they know that you care. Um, so many people don't have that, and, again, success comes when you share it. Um, look at all you profes—I mean, I'm just gon' say it—your professional athletes. I mean, I can't tell you the time and again that they set up foundations. They will set up a foundation—I mean, they make a lot of money, but they have a lot of skill, and they work hard for that. But I've noticed in their successful pathway, when they're successful, they spread the joy, and they set up a foundation for all kinds of reasons. I'm not as blessed to set up a foundation to spread the joy, but I try to give to what I c—I give as much as I can to as many things as I can. Uh, I will share that I enjoy my passion of art. I paint. I like to copy the masters: Corot, Degas, uh, Monet. There are times when we need—there'll be a charity—I try to focus on children and women—and if they need something, I will donate a painting, and we will raffle it off and give the money. So I think success is having shared yourself with—having share your talents and your gifts—with other people. And success is, um, just know who you are and be happy with who you are. Um, I have to rely on my faith, and I always do, and I think if you know who you are, and you know you are a child of God there's nothing—that's it. That's my success, and that's my happiness because that's the only person I need to please.

Brooks: Great. Um, and then the second question is, in your definition, what is a notable woman?

Pollard: Mm. Notable. Wish I had the definition.

Brooks: It's pretty vague, so that's why I want people to kind of define it themselves.

Pollard: Yeah. The question is: what is?

Brooks: What is a notable women? Yep.

[01:34:46]

Pollard: What is a notable woman? I think it's a lot of what I said about success. If you lift others up, to me, that defines who a notable woman is. Um, you do need to take care of yourself, but in doing so—it's like when you're on an airplane, and the message is, Should we have a crisis, put the mask on yourself, and then you can take care of the person beside you. So in a way, if we circle back to being a notable woman, it's someone that cares beyond herself. If you wake up and just

think about what's gonna be good for you every day, that's selfish. It's not about you. It has to be, some part of that, about other people. Other people have to help theirself, too. Um, I've been told that many—not many—times. Um, you know, we do have to take care of ourselves so that we can take care of others, and I think that woman that does that, I would say, is notable.

Brooks: Great. Alright, well those are my questions, are you comfortable wrapping it here for now?

Pollard: Yes, I am. Let me see our time.

Brooks: Okay.

Pollard: We're good. Mm-hmm.

Brooks: Yeah, alright. I'm gonna go ahead and turn this off.

Pollard: And then—

[01:36:38] [End SHEOH_016_02]

[Start SHEOH_016_03]

Brooks: Today is February 19, 2020. This is a second interview with Brenda Hill Pollard. The interview is being conducted for the State Archives of North Carolina "She Changed the World" Oral History Project. The interviewer is Ellen Brooks. Alright. So fill us in.

Pollard: The purpose of the second request is to let the listener know that the opportunity to serve on the North Carolina State Capitol Foundation for thirty four years, has been, in my mind, an opportunity of a life time because it's the office where the secretary of state occupied for fifty-plus years. And I was serving with the secretary of state, and I had eighteen and a half years. And to be on the Board of Directors for the State Capitol Foundation is an honor in that we wanna provide education for our schoolchildren so that they understand what the State Capitol represents. It's a symbol of our freedom, and our justice, and our democracy. The building itself is a national landmark, but again we have artifacts that we preserve on the Foundation. We have education there—and the governor's office is in the State Capitol, and a lot of people know that, and some people don't know that. Uh, it is where, if you come to Raleigh and you come to the seat of the government, then you come to the State Capitol where you can visit your governor, and that is something that's unique, and we think very special.

We, on the foundation, do a fundraiser—it's all volunteer based—but we do a fundraiser in the fall. We do different events, but that is money that we use and budget to work off a master list of items that need to be done. We need to provide great sidewalks so the schoolchildren can come and visit. We have over 100,000

schoolchildren in the springtime, and we call 'em the daffodils because they're just so wonderful getting off the school buses with their bag lunch, and they're gonna learn—and one day, we know, that one of the young boys or one of the young girls will be our governor, perhaps. It will set off in their mind, that, I can do this. I can be the governor of this state. I can be the voice for people that can't be heard. I can take that statewide, and I can take that on a national and global platform. So it's exciting for us to watch as they unload the buses and come into the building and see, for the first time, their government at work. And in closing on that chapter, there are three branches: the executive, the legislative, and the judges—judiciary. It's like a three-legged stool. It cannot stand on its own. It needs a check and balance, and that is for the good of North Carolina and the good for the people of North Carolina that they check each other, and there's a balance. That one's not more important than the other. So I wanted to share that—

Brooks: [both speaking at once] And how did you involved with—

Pollard: —with those in the listening.

Brooks: Mm-hm. And how did you get involved with the State Capitol Foundation?

Pollard: My involvement was through Lou Mitchell. Lou Mitchell was an advocate, community activist, and strong supporter of the Capitol. And she came and asked if I would like to consider being on the board, and I said I'd be honored to be, so she nominated me, and uh, she was on the board at its conception, in the early seventies. And uh, she is still on the board, and I am still on the board, and a of people have asked, "Why not get off the board?" But, it is a board that is very special in that, term limits have not been set in place—in that, this board, we have a former secretary of state, a former attorney general, we have former legislators on the board, we have community involvement on the board, because it is something we strongly believe represents, hopefully, the best that we have in our state. And it's the jewel that we believe, in the collection of historic sites. So that's my involvement, and why I like to be involved. More importantly, that's where I served in the secretary of state's office.

[00:04:56]

And, just to circle back, Lou would come, and in those days there were lots of pigeons on the grounds, and there was the peanut man, that would bring backs of peanuts, and sell them for, like, maybe a dollar a bag, but you would feed the pigeons—so, that's a long time ago, but it was something that was in Lou's memory and in a lot of schoolchildren's memory about coming to the Capitol, where they felt welcomed.

Brooks: Great.

Pollard: I'd like to share with the listeners that there's so much now that has opened for women to seek a seat at the table, as it were. Um, personally I've been encouraged, and just recently our State Senator Floyd McKissick was appointed to the [North Carolina] Utilities Commission by Governor Roy Cooper, and his seat was going to be vacated, so we had to hold a special election in Durham County to fill that unexpired term for that seat. And I was one of the candidates to fill that vacancy. We had the special election—only the residents in Senate District 20 could vote, so in that it was special. We had four candidates. We had two men and two women, and I felt blessed to place third. A former legislator decided to run for the seat and received 60% of that vote. We had the son of Senator Floyd McKissick—he was a candidate—and he placed, um—there was 60%—he received 20%. I placed 10%, and the fourth candidate was a female, and she placed 7%. So the numbers are what they are. But what it says is that women can run, and perhaps have a seat at the table.

Brooks: And when was that?

Pollard: That was a month ago. That was in January. I think our date—I don't have my calendar—but January 27, it was a Sunday afternoon. Um, there was a lot of attention. But in the primary, which is May—excuse me—March 3rd, that seat will be decided by all the voters in the county of Durham, and that person that's occupying the seat, who is now Senator Mickey Michaux [Henry McKinley "Mickey" Michaux Jr.], he will leave it, and that person will occupy it, who wins the primary.

So moving forward, we will have—the North Carolina Democratic Party—will have their winter State Executive Committee meeting in Charlotte on February 29. At that meeting, there will be five empty seats for the Democratic National Committee. The delegation will be the State Executive Committee members. There are over 600 that will occupy the audience. And they will decide who they want to represent them at the national level. I will be a candidate on that day. There are several that are running—there are currently five incumbents, two will not be seeking reelection. We will have three incumbents seeking reelection, but there's probably ten people, and of course, you can have people from the floor that day that might want to run from one of those seats. But in the meantime, we are campaigning online, sending messages through the mail, making phone calls, and doing videos. So it's a very aggressive campaign for one of the seats to take our values and our issues and those ideas and projects that are very important to our citizens to the national level, where we can share it with the country. So that is my next endeavor. And it's because—it started many years ago, with the opportunity to work with Secretary of State Thad Eure, and as I said earlier in an interview, he never had an executive assistant, so it occurred to him and occurred to me that—having the long tenure and having more and more given to me, that it was apparent that he needed—as people do, and times dictate—change.

[00:10:07]

So the opportunity to be his only executive assistant opened that door for myself and for many others. And so that door has opened up even more doors for me personally, to be encouraged by others, to hopefully be that female, and we need that female voice at the table. We're still struggling for that. Uh, I was in Raleigh just two weeks ago. We were marching—women still don't have the Equal Rights Amendment passed. We hope in North Carolina we'll be history-making in that endeavor. Um, I'm working very hard as chair of Women In Blue for the Democratic Women of North Carolina, and also working with the Federation of Democratic Women—that's the national level of Democratic Women—to have that voice that we need and, I think, society would benefit from to bring forth the issues that are important to us and keeps a balance of what people need to do in their lives. Because they often don't have that voice. So, that's what we're hoping for and what we're hoping to achieve when we march, and people have been marching a long time. And we'll continue to do that.

[inaudible][pause]

Brooks: Oh, yeah, um, sure.

Pollard: Okay. I wanted to share with the listeners that there is a TV show, and it's called *North Carolina Spin*, and there is a moderator, Tom Campbell, and he invites four individuals. He balances that with conservative and liberal. He also balances it with women at the table and men at the table. Um, minorities at the table. Younger people at the table. So it's a diverse panel. And *North Carolina Spin* has been on the air as a TV show for many years. Um, the contract was going to end last year, but the people in North Carolina decided to contact the TV producers who wanted to end the show—for their own reasons, of course, they own the show—but the—I call it the backlash of people saying, Please, we need this *North Carolina Spin*, because not everybody is in Raleigh, they're in Manteo; they're in Harkers Island. These are the points of the state where they just don't get to come into the Raleigh area and can focus on the issues that are so important that Tom felt that we needed to bring that to the audience in a TV show. So the producers decided to continue the show. For another year. And they'll decide if they renew it.

In the meantime, as I came in this morning to do more of the interview, I ran into Brad Krone, who's a political consultant. And when people want to run for office, Brad is the consultant, and you can sit down with Brad, and he can tell you the strategies that some candidates take, that can be—you can do radio, you can do TV, you can do yard signs, you can send out flyers in the mail, you can contact different TV stations—there's just a long list of what you wanna do and the boxes you wanna check as you campaign for the office you seek. Because there is a lot involved that people that don't run for office are not aware of. So that's why he consults. And when I ran for secretary of state, in 1996, I sought his advice. Um,

he was extremely knowledgeable in his consulting and advising, as we traveled the state, a different time, a different issue, a different strategy.

[00:15:04]

In those particular years, candidates would often go to a barbecue. North Carolina's very famous for that, and that is where a lot of people would congregate, and they would have the candidates come and speak and introduce themselves, at more of a social gathering, a more intimate gathering. But it's not that way today, this is 2020. Uh, there's not that breakfast or dinner, in that it's more online, it's more video, it's more TV, and I think in a way it's more disconnected with the voter. Because the voter really wants to know who you are and what you stand for and if that's something that they value or not.

We're seeing it on the political stage for president. There's a debate stage. And the national party has decided—and there's, the national party's made up of a lot of members, as we talked about earlier, across the country who decide the rules of the game. And to be on that debate stage, you have to have raised so much money, you have to have so many people behind you in the country, to occupy a seat—it's not even a seat, you just stand at the podium—but there's so many boxes that that has to be checked. So it's a different time, and it will be a different time twenty years from now.

But back to *North Carolina Spin*. As I was invited to be a participant as a political analyst, it is a well thought-out, planned, and organized agenda—because with the TV and the airtime, there's advertisements, the citizens are—it's a UNC TV show, but it's not paid by the tax dollars of the citizens. It is sponsored. And those are sponsors who pay for any particular ads, and they are usually related to Farm Bureau, or a healthcare company. So they want to sponsor the program. So it's not your tax dollars. But it still is a program that people can watch. It's shown three times. It's online now. And so it's a hope that—I was not sure that I would be asked this year, but the moderator is Tom Campbell, and he's hoping that I will be able to come back—and I hope that I can. And there are issues, once you're invited to be a guest, you're usually talking about current issues—and that day, if you go on that show, there could be a breaking news item that you have not even thought about, but you are gonna be questioned about it, and you'll have to have an opinion or not an opinion about it, and that's why it's so fresh and so unscripted. You cannot talk to any of the other panelists. You just have to do your own homework, as it were, and prepare yourself. So there's a lot involved, and it's a very special and unique program, and I wanted to share that with everybody. Thank you.

Brooks: And when were you on?

Pollard: It was last summer. Um, in July of 2019. And it was an opportunity to meet with other panelists in their particular professions, and what they do. And what they

do. And it was just delightful to walk in a studio—which I had not done in some time—and then the—it's, it's—in the studio it's a different—you have a greenroom. You are in the greenroom before you go into the studio, and when you go into the studio, there's simply a desk and four chairs, and maybe a cup of water on the table. And you do your questions, and Tom gives you the question, and then you answer it. And that's the format.

[00:20:11]

And I wanted to, perhaps close by saying that, um, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, there's an Institute of Politics that offered former governors to come and to speak. The institute is made up of students at the university, and, um, they wanted to hear what former governors in their tenure had to think about, had to deal with, as it were. And former Governor Jim Hunt came, former Governor Jim Martin came, and former Governor McCrory came. And it was generational. Governor Hunt had served four terms, Governor Martin had served two terms, and Governor McCrory had served one term. But to hear the issues that they had to deal with during their tenure, the audience I think really enjoyed it. There was a moderator, and she asked questions of each of the panelists, and sometimes the same question to each of them, and sometimes a different question.

We were hopeful that the former Governor Bev Perdue could come—in our history of politics, we've never had but one female governors—and she had planned to come, but unfortunately some things had occurred in her private life that she could not come. So perhaps there will be a day when she can come and share what she had to do, and how she handled it in her tenure.

So it was very special for the audience. There was not an opportunity to for the audience to ask questions, but the panelists that were there, and the moderator, I think, did an excellent job of sharing with the audience how North Carolina has come from dirt roads to paved roads, and how Research Triangle Park really brought North Carolina into the forefront of technology, as it were. And it was just exciting to see how they each, in their own leadership style, were able to bring North Carolina to the national forefront during their tenure.

And some of the fun things that they talked about was, even in their own party, they struggled trying to present their vision for North Carolina. Because, as governor, they're speaking for everybody. So, when even in their own tenure, there may have been some challenges within their own party. And that was something that a lot of people didn't know about. So it was exciting for them to come together, and at the end of the program, and the three governors held—over different parties, Democrat and Republican—but at the end of the program, they stood up and grasped each hand, and held it in unity, which was a moment that defined that North Carolina—this is, in my mind—that we are unified, even in our differences. And that's the kind of state that I wanna live in. That's the kind of

state that our people can thrive in. And that's the kind of state that North Carolina is. As the motto says, *esse quam videri*, "To be rather than to seem."

Brooks: That's great. That's all?

Pollard: I think that's it.

Brooks: Alright. Okay, I'll go ahead and turn this off.

[00:24:55] [End SHEOH_016_03]

[Start SHEOH_016_04]

Brooks: Alright. Um, today is February 19, 2020, and this is the top of the second file, uh, with the second interview with Brenda Hill Pollard.

Pollard: I wanted to, uh, share—recently our district attorney in Durham held a public forum, and it was at a local church in Durham, and it was rare and unique because others had not done that. But we have a new district attorney, and she felt that she wanted to offer the audience to come and to hear what her staff does, what she does. She's an attorney, and yet she wanted to hear what the people wanted to discuss with her in a public format. So, of course, it was open, but, of course, there were lots of notices before you walked into that sanctuary that, If you walk in here, you're on TV, um, that it's going to be filmed, and that if you did not want to be on film, then you might wanna go home because they had to tell you and give you notice.

So, of course, I wanted to be there because I wanted to hear what she has in her mind and her vision for Durham County. It is a different mindset that we haven't had. Um, she is, um, hoping to—there's been such backlog in the courthouse--she is trying to review those with her staff, and if they are ex—I mean, the—if they are explicitly minor, then they're gonna lift that because, in her mind, without a driver's license, you can't go to your job sometimes, and people need to work, and they're never gonna be able to pay that twenty dollar fine. They're doing the best they can. They're struggling, and it's just, in her mind, a minor offense. This is different for Durham County, and some of the audience wanted to ask about that philosophy. Um, there was even the mothers who had lost their children in a drive-by murder—gunshot. So, yes, they were in the audience, and they wanted to ask if she would ever let a criminal go from prison that had killed a minor child.

So it was a very transparent and a very emotionally charged meeting. And, at the end of the day, once the staff showed what they do—they introduced the staff; they had a video; the district attorney talked—and then it was up to anyone in the audience that wanted to say something. They could do it three ways: they could come to the microphone, they could write a question down and not sign their name and give it to the staff, or they could meet privately after with the district attorney.

I was there because I wanted to take the microphone, and in doing so, with taking the microphone, I wanted to turn to the audience—it was not a question—but more of remarks that the community of Durham needs to step up and speak out if something is going on, and they see it, and they think it's wrong in their community—or right in their community—to reach to the district attorney and her staff and partner with them. Because the district attorney and her staff cannot do it by themselves.

And I believe strongly that Durham County—as I travel the state of North Carolina, a lot of people will talk to me about what's going on in Durham. We're watching, and we're looking, and we're seeing some things that are different about Durham because Durham is a large county in our state. It's a progressive county. It's a future—and vision for that future—a brighter future. But a lot of people do look at our county.

So, in doing that and speaking up and speaking out, after the forum, a young lady approached me. She is a law school student at NCCU—that's North Carolina Central University in Durham—she's a first year law student, and what I'm so excited about—she is from Nigeria—and she said to me, when I spoke, it was excitement—that she wanted to be involved in the community, even more than she has been. And she is studying law, and she wants to make it better for the citizens of Durham County and North Carolina.

[00:05:19]

So, we have—I am mentoring her now. We just went to a local executive committee meeting for the Durham County Democratic Party last night. I invited her to be my guest. We will see each other again hopefully during her three-year law school at Central. But what is exciting for me, personally, is I had mentors who helped me, and I remember when the secretary of state was—he has passed now—he would mentor me, and he would say, "Brenda, I'm gonna help you. Life is a stage, and I wanna help you up on the stage, and when I'm no longer here, I want you to do the same." So what I'm hoping I'm doing is doing that. Is helping this young lady come back—come up—on the stage, be active, and then one day, she will reach forward and do the same for someone else.

And it's—in the times that my mentors were men because in the executive branch of the council of state it was only men. Now we have women on the council of state, and that's a great thing. But in those times, it was men, so they were my mentors, and it's sort of unprecedented in that, women usually mentor women, but I was in a unique situation and certainly reached for those opportunities. You have to do that. It sometimes doesn't come to you. You have to go to it.

And so, it's just been a blessing to be able to mentor younger men and women, and I wanted to share that with the listeners, that you can do that. One person can

make a difference. You just have to believe your purpose and what you want to do with your life and let that—as she said—let the light shine wherever you are. It will shine and people will come to it. They will come to the light. And I just wanted to share that moment with the listeners. Thank you.

Brooks: Great.

**[00:07:39] [End SHEOH_016_04]
[End of Interview]**